

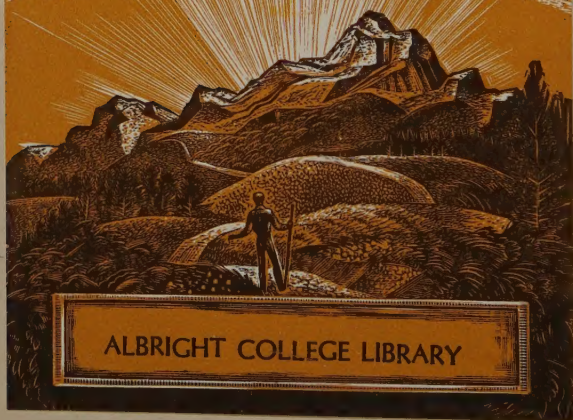


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LECTURES ON THE APOCALYPSE



# LECTURES ON THE APOCALYPSE

OR

BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN

THE DIVINE

BY

FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE, M.A.

SECOND EDITION

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## PREFACE.

THESE Lectures are not controversial or learned. They do not demand of the reader any acquaintance with the theories respecting the Apocalypse which have prevailed in earlier times or in later times, in England or elsewhere. If he has adopted any one of those theories, I trust my words may give him some help in testing it by the letter and the general purpose of the book from which it has been derived. If he has been hovering between a number of these theories, I trust my Lectures may enable him to do them all justice, to gain hints from them all, and to find the words of the Prophet more satisfactory and more intelligible than all.

Neither do I ask that the reader should bring with him that extensive knowledge of ancient or modern history which he ought to possess if he is to judge of most modern commentaries on Prophecy. The more

acquaintance he has with the facts of history—the more honestly he has sought for that acquaintance from the writers who have least desired to make out a case for the Christian Church, even from those who have been utterly sceptical about its worth—the more, I believe, will the Revelations of St. John assist in explaining those facts, and in harmonizing his own thoughts respecting the government of God in the world. But my plan precludes me from the attempt to detect any minute parallels between particular sentences in the book and particular events that have happened or that are hereafter to happen in one period or another. The principal historical allusions in these Lectures are to the state of the Roman world during the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem. These, I should like my reader to test by the Histories of Tacitus; as he will, of course, turn to Josephus for the records of the crimes and calamities of the Jewish people.

The method which I have adopted is, I believe, a very simple one. But I do not therefore pretend that I discovered it for myself. The first hint of it was given me by a revered friend, a clergyman of the school of Cecil and Venn, who had devoted much of his life to the study of Prophecy, and who, more than

twenty years ago, was permitted to leave the school in which he had been learning, for the home in which his spirit had long dwelt. He is not answerable for any of the special conclusions to which I have been led. But I can never be thankful enough for having arrived, through his teaching, at the conviction that the words, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," were used by the Evangelists in the strictest sense; that the Apostles were not wrong in believing that the end of an age was approaching; that they had no exaggerated anticipations respecting the age which was to succeed it; that if we accepted their statements simply, we should understand far better in what state we are living; what are our responsibilities; what are our sins; what we have a right to hope for.

I have called these discourses Lectures, because they are not lessons deduced from separate texts. But they were delivered from the pulpit, like ordinary sermons. They were addressed to what I thought were the wants of a congregation with which I had been connected for fourteen years, and to which, during all those years, I had been speaking often on the subject of Prophecy. I have had no heart to remove from them allusions to passing events,

and the days on which they were delivered. I have even ventured to give them a more pastoral and personal character by adding to them a sermon on the last verse in the Apocalypse, which was written less as an exposition of it, than as the expression of my wishes for a society from which I was about to part. I should not have introduced it if I had not thought that it illustrated the subject of these Lectures, as well as gave me an opportunity of testifying my continued regard and affection for those to whom I preached them.

LONDON, *December*, 1860.



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# LECTURES ON THE APOCALYPSE.

## LECTURE I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. —REV. i. 1-8.

MANY have tried to interpret this book; one after another has failed; such is the general opinion among educated men. I suspect the assertion is not wide enough; it should be extended from a single book of the Bible to all the books of the Bible; from the books of the Bible to every book whatever which

contains any truths that are worthy to be sought after. Those who try to interpret fail; the writer is found to have uttered thoughts which they have not comprehended or fathomed; others come with their rules and measures, and confound their predecessors, and are confounded in turn themselves. It is with the simplest Gospel as with the Apocalypse; it is with the poem, classical or English, as with the Gospel. Commentators have become a by-word; almost every reader fancies he has apprehended something in the writer they have handled, which they have overlooked or distorted.

But every reader, perhaps, discovers some time or other that this commentator, or that, has helped him to perceive something which he did not perceive before. He discovers that *he*, too, has the ambition to circumscribe his author by certain rules and theories of his own devising. He begins to suspect that each man might help his neighbour if he were more child-like, and revered the subject of his study more, and tried to learn laws, not to impose laws. That criticism which is not the criticism of a teacher looking down upon a pupil, but of a pupil looking up to a teacher, may after all have most discernment in it, and may bring the highest reward. Such criticism all are qualified to exercise. Some may carry away more, some less; but each will be shown something which may make his intellect clearer, his heart purer, his acts more consistent.

1. The verses which I have read to you speak of the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ the Son of God, which God gave to Him. The opening of the book, therefore, takes us at once beyond the book. That which is revealed is not a doctrine—not anything which can

be expressed in terms—but a living Person. The letters do not make or give the Revelation. God gives it. We do not disparage the letter when we say this; we adhere religiously to the letter. We contradict the book when we put it in the place of Him from whom it comes. We contradict the express language, not of the Apocalypse, but of the whole Bible.

2. How strictly I shall try to follow the letter of this chapter, and of all subsequent chapters, you will see when I speak of the clause which follows. "*To shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.*" I should be obliged to repeat myself if I dwelt upon the force of that clause here. The expression, *The time is at hand*, and several other expressions in this passage, will presently bring it under our notice.

3. "*He sent and SIGNIFIED it.*" The word "signified" is not a lazy one, for which a number of equivalents might have been found. The Apocalypse, as all have confessed, is a book of *signs*. That is assumed to be one cause of its obscurity. If we could but get the emblems all rendered into the common forms of speech, we think that we should understand it perfectly. Are we sure that signs and emblems, supposing them to be divinely chosen, may not be the best and simplest helps to the apprehension of truths which, if they were presented in what we call the common forms of speech, must remain obscure? Are they not a common, human method of discourse, which perplexes the doctor more than the peasant, just because the doctor is not in communion with the facts of life as the peasant is? If the Revelation is indeed to be of a Person, may not the signs denote his actual presence, while abstract words would only express some notions about him?

4. In this book, then, as in all the preceding books

of the Bible, God Himself is set forth as speaking to men through words or signs. Whatever methods or persons may be used as the media of the revelation, He is the Revealer. He takes off the veil which hinders that which is near to us from being known to us, or the veil over our hearts which hinders them from discerning it. That is to be remembered before we turn at all to secondary agents. Here one of them is said to be an angel. "*He sent and signified it by his ANGEL to his servant John.*" I take this name as most would take it, to denote a messenger from another world. But I must remind you that it is also used to denote men living in this world, like in all respects to their fellows, committing sins, certain to die. I must remind you that when it is so used the writer does not say, "Now I am applying the word in a different sense from that in which I applied it before." He evidently desires us to feel that the sense is the same. He believes that the presence of mortal accidents, or the absence of them, does not interfere with the primary fact that those of whom he speaks are messengers of God, receiving light from Him, imparting that light to those for whom he designs it. If there is anything spiritual in man, it must be susceptible of such communications; if there is nothing spiritual in man, the Bible would not have been written; there would have been no need of such a book; no possibility of it. But I think we shall learn from this, more than from any preceding part of the Bible, how the dreams of men respecting an invisible world and its inhabitants are substantiated; how their thoughts of an intercourse between that world and this may become, not fantastical and superstitious, but calm and orderly.



5. "*He sent and signified it by his angel to HIS SERVANT JOHN.*" Great difficulties have been felt by students in identifying the writer of the Apocalypse with the writer of the Gospel and the Epistles. The earliest ecclesiastical historian gives a hint of another John to whom many have been willing to assign the composition of this book. The latest and most advanced school of German Rationalists has rejected this opinion. The disciples of that school give the Apostle credit for a work in which they can detect nothing but vehement Jewish prejudices and hostility to St. Paul. They, however, like those who seek another author, perceive the greatest contrast between the Apocalypse and the Gospel. That they refer to the second century. And supposing the superscription of this book did *not* answer to the contents of it—supposing it were *not* a revelation of Jesus Christ the Son of God, but merely a collection of predictions concerning the future—I do think it would require an overwhelming amount of external evidence to persuade us that it could proceed from him who wrote of the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; who reported the dialogues with Nicodemus, with the woman of Samaria, at the Feasts of Tabernacles and of the Dedication. There is an amazing difference between the two books, while we adhere to the popular notion respecting one of them, such as I think we can never practically forget, however we may force ourselves into an opinion of their common origin. But if we assume the writer to be capable of defining his own intention, and if that intention is visible through every after vision and prophecy, I believe no person was so likely to write of the fall of Babylon or of the New Jerusalem, as he who bore record of the "*Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all*"

*things that he saw.*" There is a peculiarity in that description which a Sophist could not have reached. He might have spoken of the Son of Thunder, or of the beloved Disciple. He might have spoken of the Theologian who wrote about the Divine Word. In this sentence are combined the *opposite* characteristics of those writings which the Church has received as St. John's. The writer of the fourth Gospel discourses more than the other evangelists of that which is high and mysterious. He sets forth more than the other evangelists that which is visible and palpable. He never separates one from the other. In the simplest language he presents the simplest acts of his Master as manifestations of His eternal character and nature. Those objects which commentators have found it hard to reconcile, and which have led them into the most contradictory theories respecting the fourth Gospel, are blended here with childlike art. How they are blended in the Apocalypse itself, we shall see as we proceed.

6. "*Blessed*"—this is the next sentence—"is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : for the time is at hand." This benediction has been quoted again and again by writers who have wished to fix our attention upon this book, and to overcome the listlessness or despair with which so many are disposed to regard it. "Have we not here a Divine promise," they have asked, "that we shall be better for engaging in this study? Ought we not to rely upon that promise and to hope for results, even if the disappointments of previous students have been ever so numerous?" The force of the argument, very strong in itself, has been weakened in the minds of numbers by the clause with which the verse concludes. If indeed the teacher of

the seventeenth, or the eighteenth, or the nineteenth century could persuade his hearers that the time which is said to be at hand, were the year, or the decade, or the half-century which would follow that wherein he was speaking, he might have a good prospect of engaging their thoughts, even if they were deeply absorbed in other pursuits and interests. Accordingly this has been a common effort of interpreters. *That* date must belong to events which occurred in a period just preceding our own; *this* must point to some which are to come forth out of a not distant future. But if the seventeenth-century commentator was *not* wrong in his anticipation, then it strikes the hearer or the reader that the nineteenth-century commentator must be wrong in his. If the seventeenth-century commentator *was* wrong, why should his successor be more fortunate in his guess, or, at all events, why should we desert certainties for the sake of inquiring whether he is so or not? And there is always another and more serious suspicion lying behind these. Did not the original writer use words in their simple, natural sense? If he told the readers and hearers of his day that *the time* was *at hand*, did he not mean them to understand that it *was* at hand? Can he possibly have designed that what he expresses so definitely should be taken indefinitely? Can he have supported a Divine promise with an assurance which was belied by the event, or else with what in an uninspired writer we should call a pious fraud?

7. I confess, my brethren, that these questions seem to me in the last degree serious and awful. I can only find one answer to them. I take the words in their most direct and straightforward sense. I believe that the time of which St. John wrote was

at hand when he wrote. I as little suppose him to have been mistaken about its nearness, as I suppose him to have been a wilful deceiver. I do not, however, admit the promise to be less good for the seventeenth, or eighteenth, or nineteenth centuries, because I suppose that events occurred in the first century which were of transcendent importance; which denoted the termination of an age; which deserved to be described as the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Before I could hold that this passage was emptied of any of its worth or reality to us because the revelation was made centuries ago, I must change the meaning of one of the words that occur in the course of it; at least, I must abandon the scriptural interpretation of that word for a vulgar heathen interpretation of it. St. John speaks of the words of this *PROPHECY*. Were Prophecy a mere announcement of future events—had it no other force than that which the Babylonian soothsayers and prognosticators gave to it—I should confess at once that when an event has occurred, any prophecy which has to do with that event is exhausted, except, perhaps, as an evidence for the fidelity of the predictor. But the Jewish prophets, so far from desiring to be identified with these soothsayers and prognosticators, regarded them with horror, and protested vehemently against those of their countrymen who, while mimicking their acts, dared to adopt the sacred language, "*The burden of the Lord,*" or "*The Lord hath said.*" Prophecy, according to their use and understanding of it, is the utterance of the mind of Him who is, and was, and is to come. Events, days of the Lord, crises in national history, were manifestations of His everlasting mind and pur-

pose. The seer was to explain the past and the present; only in connexion with these did he speak of the future. He told what curses men were bringing upon themselves by transgressing the laws which individuals and nations were created to obey. He told how the purposes of the Divine Will were developing themselves in a regular progression in despite of the opposition of all self-will. He told how they would move on steadily till all that God designs for man, for this universe, for His own glory, has been accomplished. This is Prophecy, if we take our notion of it from the books which we receive as authoritative, if we do not contract and distort them that they may fit some conception which we have derived from another source. But if it is so, why should an event that has passed be less full of might and significance to us than one that is to come? If we can find an interpreter to tell us what its signification is, may not that signification be of the profoundest interest to one period and another? May not each period get some glimpse of it which another had not? May it not connect that glimpse with events of which it has the experience, events passing in God's world, events therefore subject to the same law, the consequences of similar doings, pregnant with results not dissimilar to those which the Prophet has discoursed of? Surely there may be a blessing upon the hearers and readers of his oracles, though they believe that his oracles were not ambiguous; that he never trafficked with words in a double sense. Surely times may be at hand to men in every generation which may render it most needful that they should try to enter into the meaning of the times which were at hand in his generation. Surely as an age, or, as we sometimes call it, a dispensation of God,

advances towards its consummation, the need may become greater, and the hope that we shall be permitted to profit by past illuminations and past mistakes and confusions, greater also.

8. In trying to set forth the idea of Prophecy, which I discover in the earlier Prophets of his nation, I have borrowed some words from the next passage in this chapter. At first you might regard that passage as merely a devout rapture. The more you reflect upon it, the more I believe it will explain the whole purpose of the book. *“John to the seven churches which are in Asia : Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come ; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne ; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”*

To these seven Churches St. John declares the Revelation which God has made to him. It is the Revelation of Him who is, and was, and is to come ; it is the Revelation of Him in His own perfect and absolute nature as the source from which all the grace and peace that ever have been known by any of His creatures, that ever can be known, have proceeded. It is the Revelation of that one Spirit—seven being the perfect number,



the expression of unity amidst variety—who dwells in their Churches: who bestows on them their distinct graces and gifts; who binds them into one; the Spirit of Grace and Peace. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, who has these three titles and descriptions: (1) That He is the faithful and true Witness of the Eternal God—He in whom the Spirit dwells without measure, He who sets forth His Father as the perfect Goodness, and Truth, and Love; (2) That He is the first begotten of the dead, the Conqueror of man's enemy, the Conqueror for all the family of God; (3) That He is the Prince of all the kings of the earth; the actual Lord over men, to whom all must at last do homage. What He is, and what He has accomplished for our race, cannot be set forth in cold and dry propositions. The expression of it must be in thanksgiving to Him that hath loved us with a love that is and was and is to come; to Him whose love has manifested itself in act and suffering; to Him whose acts and sufferings have been for the deliverance of men from the sins which set them at war with Him and with each other, and were the cause of their misery; to Him who has not been contented with washing us from our sins in His own blood, but who has made us kings under Him; rulers over ourselves, rulers over the earth to which we are naturally slaves; who has made us priests under Him, to offer up holy sacrifices to God and His Father; to Him be glory and praise for ever and ever.

9. I have spoken of *this* as the Revelation or Apocalypse. And I believe as you proceed with the study of the book, you will find that it is occupied throughout with that Divine Name into which the Christian Churches are baptized, in which all are living and moving and having their being. Such an Apocalypse must be for

all times that were to follow; as all times that had been before were preparing for it. The full Revelation of this Name must be the Revelation of Revelations; that which throws light upon every other. But how is it with the words which follow? "*Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.*" Adhering to the order of the words, and to the letter of them, I cannot doubt that they were intended to tell the seven Churches how they should contemplate the dark events which were to happen in their time; the time of a tremendous crisis in the Roman Empire; the time of the overthrow of the Jewish Polity. In the dark clouds of that time they were to own the coming of the Son of Man. The Judge was there; confessed by the consciences of all men; confessed by the consciences of those who had pierced Him as a blasphemer and a malefactor. The Churches should be able to interpret these signs. They should know what luminous form was behind the clouds; should hear, in the wailings of the kindreds of the earth, the wailings after that very King and Deliverer whom they had rejected, and before whom they trembled.

10. I do not wish to anticipate what may be said better on future occasions respecting these seven Churches, or this awful Name, or this coming with clouds. I take these verses only as a series of indications which the book is to unfold. In that light also I receive the concluding verse, which is repeated in the vision that follows. It may, as some have thought, have been transferred by accident from that place to this. But we want to be reminded at the outset and in many ways Who is the subject of the book, that we may never be tempted to behold in it only a number

of scattered rays of light without a centre from which they have issued and to which they converge. We want to be reminded that it is not enough for us to trace all things and all men to their origin, unless we can also find the end for which they exist. We want to know that only a living person can be the Alpha and Omega, the starting-point of Creation and its final Rest.

I shall rejoice if I am able to give you a few hints respecting this great book which will assist your own readings in it. I am sure it will reward the study of the layman quite as much as of the priest; that it need not tempt him into any fantasies, but may deliver him from a multitude of fantasies; that God may use it to guide us through dark roads and tangled thickets, in which we are all likely to lose our way; that it will become intelligible when we ask its help in practice rather than in speculation. The blessing on him who hears, and on them that read, is one of those which will not pass away. May it descend upon us richly from Him who is the Author of all blessings!

## LECTURE II.

### THE SON OF MAN.

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven Churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven Churches.—REV. i. 9-20.

WHETHER we adopt or reject the ordinary opinion that St. John had already survived his brother Apostles, the language at the opening of this passage is very

remarkable. He dwelt commonly at Ephesus, in the midst of the Christians of Asia Minor. They turned to him afterwards, with the profoundest reverence, as the last depositary of the words which Christ had spoken on earth. And he describes himself as "*your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.*" No assertion of his apostolical authority, of his grand traditions, of his difference from those whom he is addressing. He is one of them, their fellow-worker and fellow-sufferer.

I do not allude to this mode of speaking that I may draw any inference from it respecting the peculiar humility of this Divine teacher. St. Paul, it seems to me, was just as humble when he was asserting strongly his claims to be an Apostle, and was denouncing those Judaisers who tried to degrade him below the original twelve. Self-assertion may be as great a duty as self-depreciation; both are evil so far as they are in the least degree affected; one may involve as much sense of individual feebleness as the other. They may have the same origin; they may in different circumstances lead to the same result. Had St. Paul forborne to put forth a boast of his apostolical title and character, he would have sanctioned the conclusion that his Lord, when He ceased to be visible, ceased to exercise His government over His Church; ceased to call out men to do His work. The man who declared that he trusted not in his wisdom of words when he went forth declaring the testimony of God, would have been trusting in that wisdom, not in his calling, not in the Spirit that helped his infirmities. Had St. John spoken to the Churches in Asia Minor of the voice that bade him leave his father's nets, he might have led them to suppose that that voice was silent then, or could not reach

them. Had he talked of his apostolical commission, or of his own special place amongst the Apostles, he might have led them to think that when he left the world they would be bare of the Divine Presence : that only an oral or written tradition of it would remain. Exactly the opposite lesson to this was that which he was appointed to teach his own generation, and all subsequent generations ; therefore it was fitting that he should describe himself, not by titles which set him apart from other men, but as their brother and companion.

1. That he was an exile in the Isle of Patmos, he tells us. Whether the local authorities of Ephesus had sent him there, or whether it was a solemn deportation by the act of the Emperor, we cannot learn from his words. Nor does this passage help us to settle the question which has been raised whether his banishment was so early as the reign of Claudius, so late as the reign of Domitian, or at some time intermediate between the two. On the cause of his banishment he throws more light. By far the majority of St. Paul's persecutions were stirred up by Jews ; the two memorable exceptions were at Philippi, where he provoked the hatred of those who traded in magic, and at Ephesus, where a true instinct led Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen to think that he was injuring their gains, though he had not denounced their goddess. But the charge by which the Jews stirred up the mob of Thessalonica was to be at last the effective one. These men *do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus*. That charge could not be permanently effective till it was combined with the one on which the rulers of the Sanhedrim had convicted our Lord of blasphemy. *He*



*maketh himself the Son of God.* St. John proclaiming the Word of God, who was before all worlds, who had been made flesh and dwelt among men, who was the King of kings and Lord of lords, struck a blow at the worship as well as the polity of the Roman Empire. He opposed the God-man to the man-God. The best emperors, who were trying to disguise by reverence for laws, by merciful acts, by philosophy, the rotten foundation of their power, had as much reason to dislike this testimony as the worst, who were embodying the false principle in themselves.

2. St. John does not tell us what objects he chiefly contemplated in that island, what sounds besides the roar of the Ægean waves came to him from the outer world. He says that on the Lord's day, the Resurrection day, he "*was in the Spirit*;" withdrawn from the forms of which the senses take account; seeking his eternal and substantial home. Then came a voice to his heart, a voice like the sound of a trumpet such as wakes the dead, saying "*I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.*" Like that name, the *I AM*, which had been spoken centuries before to the shepherd in the desert, it was a witness to him that there is a living Personal ground; which was before temples, cities, earth, sea, and sky; which will last whatever becomes of them. Like the message to Moses, it was not for himself. "*What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches of Asia.*" Those Churches were to learn the meaning of their own existence; what they had to do; how they were related to Him who is the First and the Last.

3. "*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.*" The voice comes from no creature about me. It is not the echo of my own thoughts. It comes

as a command to my spirit from the Ruler of my spirit.

4. "*And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks.*" Our first thought is that now we are entering into a region of symbols. Are not these candlesticks like the one of pure gold which Moses was bidden to place in the Tabernacle; like that somewhat different one which Solomon caused to be worked when he built a house for the Lord God of Israel? Like these assuredly; dear to the Apostle for the resemblance; intended to remind Israelites, and those of the Church who were not Israelites, of a sacred past; of a worship that was soon to cease. But intended also, as we shall presently see, to raise them out of symbols; to translate signs into their signification; to show them in the midst of what practical realities they were dwelling. No greater testimony, I think, could be given than is given here that symbols would always have a worth for human beings; but that the world's babyhood was over; that the truths were now to throw light on the parables rather than the parables on the truths; that men were to study the visions of an earlier day by the revelations of that later day.

5. For "*in the midst of the seven candlesticks was one like unto the Son of Man.*" That the candlestick pointed to the communication of light; that the light must be dispersed, yet one; that it was set in the Tabernacle to denote Him who was worshipped there as the Source of Light, the worshippers as the instruments of sending it abroad; this was a lesson which it required no skill to bring out; it must have gone home to a number of hearts which would not have understood it if it had been put into words. But the

more it went home, the more questions it will have excited. Only those on whom it produced *no* impression will have been content either to look at the candlestick or to hear the Scribe's interpretation of it. "How may this light reach *me*? How may I show it forth? Is it indeed a light for all Israel? Is all Israel to be a lamp to mankind? How can this be? Are we not often ministers of darkness? And does God really desire that His light should go forth *everywhere*? Is it not meant to be confined to His chosen people?" Such thoughts the symbol will have awakened in those for whom it did its work. Nothing they saw satisfied them. It led them to seek for light, and they who sought found more than they dreamed of, though never enough. They found more and more indications of a Light that was near them; more and more of a Light that lightened every man. They rejoiced in what was given. But they waited to hear that what they felt must be true, *was* true; that God's Light was indeed man's Light; that there was One in whom all scattered rays of light were gathered up; from whom they could be received; by whose power they might be diffused.

To see the SON OF MAN walking *in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks* was at once to proclaim that these candlesticks had an actual signification, and that they had no more a merely limited Jewish signification. They were no longer any part of the furniture of the Tabernacle or of the Temple. The one candlestick, with its six and its ten branches, had been lighted long enough in Jerusalem. The flame there had burnt itself out. He who had kindled it to be a witness of Himself and His own presence with men, was *indeed* present.

The Son of Man, and not some other, some secondary substitute for Him—some formal image of Him—was dispensing light to the sons of men.

6. Such a Revelation must have been just what a Jew, mourning bitterly over the present condition of his countrymen, and looking to their more dismal prospects, must have needed for his consolation; just what he must have desired that all should share with him. But it would have been most imperfect if only the golden candlestick in the Jewish Temple had been rendered into its true meaning, and raised to its highest power. *Things* were not chiefly important in the ritual of that Temple; the *persons* who ministered were far more sacred. What was the holy of the holies itself to the high priest who entered it once every year?

It is this high priest who is at once recalled to us by the first part of the description of the Son of Man. He was "*clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*" That this is the sacerdotal vesture there can be no doubt. Enough is said to indicate that the Son of Man claims and fulfils the office which was assigned to the children of Aaron; that He blesses the people in God's name; that He stands as their Representative before His Father. The Alpha and Omega takes the place of him whose work was well-nigh over; who had ceased to be any witness for God or for man; who was rather a barrier between them.

But the seer passes rapidly from the clothing of the priest, from that which is merely official, to Himself. "*His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.*" What St. John saw for a few moments on Mount Tabor, when the face of the Man of Sorrows "*did shine as the sun, and his raiment was*

*white as the light,"* was presented to Him now as an abiding glory. "*His eyes were as a flame of fire;*" looking into the heart and spirit, discovering whatever is false; burning it with their love. The *feet* have the signs of endurance and suffering. They have walked over the earth and been scorched and sanctified by it. They are "*like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*" The roar of the sea is in the ears of the lonely man in Patmos. Its strange and various notes are blended in the voice of the Son of Man, which is "*as the sound of many waters.*"

8. From the robes which denote the priest we have passed to the form of the Divine Man; a form expressing purity, conflict, victory, calm and reconciling power; but never suggesting mere qualities or attributes apart from a Person in whom they dwell. Then we return to the thought from which we started. This Son of Man is walking in the midst of the candlesticks; He is the centre of light. It is a heavenly light; not belonging to earth; though penetrating to the farthest corners of the earth. The light is not now in the Tabernacle or the Temple. "*He had in his right hand seven stars.*" The Persian night-worshipper, the Greek worshipper of Apollo, may still see in the forms of nature the witnesses of the true King. "*And out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.*" The forms of nature, beautiful and true as they are, must do homage to the word which speaks to man. Out of the mouth goes forth that which distinguishes soul and spirit, joints and marrow; that which severs between the good and the evil, the false and the true. How essential this feature is to the picture of the Son of Man we shall feel more and more. Its effect when it is combined with the former, is to change the images of

night into those of day. The stars were in His *hand*, but His "*countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*"

9. "*And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead.*" Years of familiarity with the contemplation of the Son of Man have not abated the awe of the old disciple, but deepened it. Mere power does not make him tremble. Before the form of the Divine Goodness, before the eyes that are as a flame of fire, he is weak as a child. The moments even of lower revelations must be moments of terror. The first glimpse of a natural discovery, if it sometimes causes the shout of *εὕρηκα*, as often crushes him to whom it comes with a sense of his own insignificance, and with a wonder at what may be behind. To be assured that he was before Him who is the First and the Last, was not this enough to cause that a poor exile, though the most favoured of the Apostles, should fall at His feet as dead?

10. And what are the words that raise him? Are they "Fear not, I am He whom thou knewest in Cana or on Tabor; I am He that placed thee nearest to Myself"? No! but, "*Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*" It could not console or revive St. John to be told of what had been done for *him*; how *he* had been singled out from the rest of his race. It did restore him to be assured that the countenance which he could not bear to look on was His who had been under the power of that death and of that grave which are appointed for every malefactor, as well as for every apostle; and that He had risen the Conqueror of these, the Conqueror for men. Yes! to hear these words ringing in his ears, "*I have the keys of hell and of death;*" of all that thou fearest, of all that man fears,



of all that sin has caused him to fear; to be convinced that these are the words of the Son of Man; this must be a comfort to every apostle and martyr, such as the thought of the life he had lived, and the witness he had borne, and the death he was dying, would be utterly unable to give. When all these recollections are drowned in the recollections of evils committed and of evils present; when death and hell look as if they might be worse abysses for him than for any poor vagabond who had never thought of them; then this belief in One who has dived into them because He is the Son of Man, and has found what is deeper than they, and has the keys of that kingdom as well as of the kingdom of heaven; this message meets him as perfectly satisfying, because it overthrows every selfish confidence, and obliges him to rest on the Redeemer and King and Lover of the universe.

11. And since it is so, he is raised up to do a work for his fellows; only if he does that, will he be able to hold fast his own trust. "*Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*" The things which he has seen are not some special illuminations for him. They are facts which concern all men; the principles of human life and fellowship. The Son of Man is not for that moment walking in the midst of the candlesticks. He is so always. St. John must write of the things that were, in order that he might write of the things which were to be *hereafter*. He can be of use as an interpreter to countries he never saw, to times of trouble which should be after he had entered into rest, by faithfully interpreting the condition of the people with whom he was most closely in contact, of those who were his contemporaries and companions.

12. And how is he to fulfil this task? He is told at once to tear off the veil from those outward images which he had been contemplating, from those which seemed as if they were to replace the images of the other dispensation. *They* are not to replace these images; the things which these images represent are to replace them. The *mystery*, or inner meaning of the candlesticks, or seven stars, is to be declared. "*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*" And so this verse rises naturally out of the previous one. The prophet is to write things which he has seen, and which are, and which shall be hereafter. He has seen the candlesticks and Him with the stars in His right hand. These Churches were then, and were to be afterwards. They were then distinct from each other, under distinct ministers. Each of these ministers was an angel or messenger of God. Though distinct, they formed one whole. There was one Church amidst many Churches. The whole body was sent into the world to diffuse light through it. Each of the distinct bodies was to diffuse light over a sphere of its own. Each of the ministers was to be a star of light to the body which he served. Each was to understand that his light came not from himself, but from the Centre of light. Each would fail in his function if, under one temptation or another, he forgot this condition of his existence. Each by failing in his function would injure the society which he was to enlighten, would infect it with his own evil. These things *were*. The hereafter would be determined by the now; in principle they would be the same. These Churches were formed, not for a day or a year, but for an ever-renewing life. They were to last on when one star

after another disappeared ; for the Son of Man was walking in the midst of them. The Church would last, even though particular Churches ceased to be ; for the Son of Man was in the midst of it. If all perished, He would not perish. These were not revelations only for the apostolical era ; this revelation was especially to prepare the way for the termination of that era ; that none might suppose that the Church depended for its stability or vitality upon those who had been the first pillars of it ; that none might suppose that any one of *them* was the centre of it. The mystery of the seven candlesticks and of the seven stars is, then, a mystery which the struggles of that time were to evolve ; which the struggles of all subsequent generations were to elucidate. By the sins of particular angels or ministers, by the sins of one and another Church, no less than by the light which one or another was able to diffuse, would each aspect of this mystery be brought into fuller manifestation. More and more it would be seen that a Church which does not diffuse light, must increase darkness ; must gather darkness into itself. More and more it would be known what temptation each Church has to become a minister of darkness, and how great that darkness is. More and more it would be seen what judgments awaken Churches out of their torpor, and what are the notes of their doom.

13. This is but a part, and a small part, of the Revelation. But if we open our hearts to take it in, many of the doubts which embarrass us in considering the later parts of the book will be cleared away. We shall be far less tormented with the question, "If these words concerned Jerusalem or Rome in the days of Galba or Vespasian, how can they concern London in the days of Queen Victoria?" The mystery of the

seven golden candlesticks must relate to both if it relates to either. Supposing Churches still to exist; supposing the Bible to be the book from which we are to derive our knowledge of the end for which they exist, of the methods in which they may promote that end, of the sins by which they may frustrate it; we need not doubt that we shall find as many lessons about Mediæval Churches and Reformed Churches, about the relation of particular Churches to the Catholic Church, about Imperial and Papal domination, as the commentators who have shaped the whole Apocalypse into a testimony concerning them have been able to work out. We shall find these lessons, not by changing present tenses for future, but by observing that the present tenses are tenses of continuance; that the principles which were developed at one moment must govern all succeeding moments. We shall find them when we are not looking for them: they will force themselves upon us most, when we are the least trying to make them square with events of history, or events of history with them. Above all, we shall understand them best and be most capable of using them to connect different events and epochs in the records of mankind, when we allow them to bear with the most direct force upon ourselves.

Primitive Churches, Mediæval Churches, Continental Churches, seats of Papacy and of Empire—yes, it is well to know what we can know of them. But are not *you* a Church, a body of men from whom light is meant to go forth? Does it go forth from you? Are there not ministers in the Church of England? Will not the Son of Man, who walks in the midst of the candlesticks, ask each of *them*, “Art thou uttering thy

own dreary traditional common-places ; art thou pouring forth thine own dreams and speculations ; art thou strutting thy little hour as the actor on a stage, as the oracle of a school ; or art thou caring to be a messenger of My purpose, a star in My right hand ? ”

## LECTURE III.

### THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my



faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works until the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and

repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as the thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And to the angel of the church of Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and

will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

OUR subject last Sunday was the revelation or unveiling of the Son of Man to His servant John. He was walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks. He had the robes of the High Priest. His form was Divine and human. Light was in Him and went forth from Him. He had died, and He lived. He was alive for evermore. He had the keys of death and hell.

What John saw and heard, he was to tell ; he was to write it in a book for the good of the seven Churches that were in Asia. For these seven Churches were declared to be the seven candlesticks, in the midst of which the Son of Man was walking. They were to shed abroad the light which dwelt in Him. The stars which He held in His hand denoted their angels or ministers. The revelation of Him was therefore a revelation to them, a revelation of their relation to each other, of the end for which they existed.

The second and third chapters carry on this revelation. They contain a series of messages to these Churches. These messages have been accepted by readers who see little meaning in the other parts of the book, or despair of finding its meaning, as having great practical worth. In every period of the history of Christendom they have been felt to have a force for *that* period. It has been found so impossible to confine them by the conditions of the Apostolic age—by the circumstances of Asia Minor—that theories

have been framed to show which time of the Church was the Sardian, which the Philadelphian, which the Laodicean. After what I have said of the maxims which I wish to follow in studying this book, you will not suspect me of any fondness for such theories. I do not care to inquire which is the best, or which the worst. I am determined to adhere to the Apostle, and when he speaks of his time, to suppose that he means his time ; when he speaks of Sardis or Philadelphia, to suppose that he means Sardis or Philadelphia. But I take such theories as witnesses that the revelation which this book contains is a revelation of that which abides, of that which is not dependent upon circumstances, however they may affect or modify its appearances. In this respect I do not find that the messages to the Churches differ from the parts of the book which precede or which follow them. If we are permitted to understand them, to feel in any degree their force upon our own lives, it will be because the Spirit who spoke them to the Churches of old is speaking them to us now ; because He who was promised to be with the Church for ever, of whose living power the Church is the witness, has not ceased to live or to work. It will be because He opens our ears that we may hear what in these messages, or elsewhere through any instruments, He is saying to us and to mankind.

I. 1. Before I allude to any of the special characteristics of these messages, I wish you to notice that which is common to them all. The first and most obvious of these common characteristics is one for which I have prepared you already. St. John, their companion in the faith and patience of Jesus Christ, St. John the Apostle, who was dearest to them, who was to survive all his brother Apostles, is *not* address-

ing them. To one and to all the Son of Man is speaking Himself. To one and to all He is declaring that He knows them, knows what they are, and what they are doing. To one and to all He makes known the secret of their own lives. *“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works. And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works.”*

The language, you will perceive, is uniform in these respects,—that it identifies the speaker with the Person who was unveiled to the Apostle in the Isle of Patmos, and that He and He only is assumed to know what the works of each Church are. The difference between the messages lies in the discovery of one

aspect of this Divine Person to one of these Churches, of another to another; these discoveries having, as we shall see hereafter, reference to their peculiar tendencies and dangers.

2. The second general characteristic is that these words are repeated after each message, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" When we have examined the account which is given of them more closely, we shall discover, I believe, why it was not enough to tell them that *the Son of Man* was in the midst of them, that he knew what they were doing. To admit this is possible. To recognise Him as in *some sense* a Head of all Churches, as in *some sense* discerning their qualities, as in *some sense* ruling them, has not been found very difficult in later times, and would not, by many, have been felt so in that time. But to join this with the belief that He is conversing inwardly with them by His *Spirit*, that by this *Spirit* He is convincing them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, that by this *Spirit* He is appealing to that which is most inward and permanent in them, not to that which is casual or impulsive—that, I suspect, was the difficulty then, and has been ever since. It took, we shall find, different forms. Now, the confession of a Son of a Man could become a mere hard, outward, almost material confession. Now, the confession of a Spirit could be turned into the excuse for all lawlessness and fanaticism. Therefore that every message should begin with one of these revelations and end with the other, is, I conceive, very significant, and one of the great reasons why we feel that in reading of the Asiatic Churches of eighteen centuries ago, we are reading of the European Churches in the midst of which we are dwelling.



3. Again, that is no less obvious a mark of all these messages, to which I adverted last week, when I was speaking of the seven stars. Each one is addressed to the whole body, in the person of its angel. There were differences, evidently very broad differences, in the behaviour and moral life of the different persons who composed the respective Churches. These are in some cases noted. But still there is a mind and temper attributed to the society, of which the mind and temper of the minister are taken to be faithful indexes. He is the representative of the particular Church over which he presides. There is no speech to the individual members of it apart from him. With these materials we may easily build up a structure of priestcraft, and plead St. John's authority for it. It is *inevitable* that such a structure should arise, if *this* part of St. John's words only is regarded, if that part which concerns the walking of the Son of Man in the midst of the candlesticks, and the presence of the Spirit with the Churches, is forgotten. Take those Divine revelations away, take away the illustration which they receive from St. John's abnegation of all honour to himself, and it requires no elaborate ecclesiastical theory to make priests into tyrants and Churches into slaves. This effect will follow naturally, because there is such a craving for unity in the heart of men, there is such an inward sense that we are constituted under some head, there is such a consciousness of a responsibility in fathers for their children, in kings for their subjects, in ministers for their congregations, that when the Divine principle is forgotten which explains these convictions and determines their limits, there will be perpetually new manifestations of anarchy in opposition to priestcraft. If the minister forgets that he is a messenger of God, he

can only avoid becoming a usurper over men by becoming their tool.

4. Once more, there is this common characteristic of these messages: every one ends with some words concerning struggle and victory. To the Ephesian angel it is written, "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*" To the angel of Smyrna, "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" To the angel of Pergamos, "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*" To the angel in Thyatira, "*He that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.*" To the Sardian, "*He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*" To the Philadelphian, "*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*" To the Laodicean, "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*"

II. 1. I fancy that if the first three of these characteristics have not severed the Churches of the Apostolic period from those of later periods, the

fourth will be supposed to savour peculiarly of the times in which Christians were persecuted for their faith. These earnest calls to overcome must, it will be thought, have reference to the cross, or the stake, or the amphitheatre, or, at all events, the prison. If you read through these chapters, you will be struck with the rarity of the allusions to any such perils. The most notable case—the only case in which the call to struggle and the promises to the victors are directly connected with outward suffering—is that of Smyrna: “*These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*” Then occurs the further promise which I have quoted already: “*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*”

In this city there was a persecution; it would seem, not a Roman persecution at all; one proceeding from a synagogue of Jews, from men who clung to that venerable name, though they denied the King of the Jews. Such men, by their influence in particular cities before or after the fall of Jerusalem, might easily raise a violent storm against the sect of Nazarenes, might easily procure them to be cast into prison. If they were themselves in rebellion (as was shown in the second century, when they followed Barcochba as their Messiah), they were especially willing and able to inflict sufferings on the disciples of the Crucified. Or again, if the Roman authorities put them down violently, the

Christians might easily be included among them, as having a common origin, and as abjuring idols equally with the rest of their race. Such a persecution would be quite as terrible to the Church of Smyrna as if it had been of the most general and systematic kind. It had evidently borne the best fruits in the life of pastor and flock. Though poor, they were rich. He that was dead and had become alive, and lived for evermore, saw in them the blessed result of His travail and agony. Still, they needed strength and consolation. The tribulation would be sharp if it was short. The flesh would shrink from it. But let them hold on. The second death, the death of the spirit, would not reach those who were trusting in the Deliverer from death. There was life in Him. Was not that life for them? Was any royal crown like that?

I have taken this Church first out of its order. The words spoken to it must have cheered thousands in different generations. They must have felt that the message was as really addressed to them as to the angel of the Church in Smyrna, and that it could only come from Him who had died and was alive. But though it would be an infinite loss that this instance of a body suffering persecution should have been wanting among the seven, it is not a specimen of the others, but an exception. Pergamos is spoken of as Satan's seat; probably as it had been one of the wealthiest of the cities in Asia Minor it had been an especial resort of Jews, and they were there more than usually hostile. A distant allusion is made to a former tribulation, in which Antipas had been a faithful martyr, and in which the Church had held fast Christ's name. But apparently that peril was over; at all events it is not the one which the angel is chiefly warned of. In

Philadelphia, again, there is a reference to a "*synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie.*" This synagogue might greatly annoy the Christians of Philadelphia. But apparently the chief annoyance came from their assuming that they were the people of God, and from their denouncing those who confessed Jesus to be the Son of God as deserters from the old faith. On the whole, there cannot be a greater perversion of the words of the book than to associate the conquests of which it speaks chiefly with external troubles, or to suppose that the seven Churches were passing through experiences of this kind, which made them unsuitable either as examples or beacons for those in ease or security.

2. If we are not allowed to form this highly plausible theory respecting the condition of these early Churches, we are still more sternly prohibited from entertaining another: that they were free from the invasion of immoral doctrines and habits; or that, if these appeared, they never took root. In the message to Ephesus, we hear of the deeds of the "*Nicolaitanes, which I hate.*" There these deeds were discouraged and kept down by the angel of the Church. But in Pergamos they appear to have gained a head, and to be connected with another doctrine, which is said to be that "*of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*" It is charged upon the angel of Thyatira, that he suffers "*that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*"

That there is a difference in the three doctrines or habits of mind designated by these three names, I fully



believe. That there was one characteristic common to them all, an indifference to ordinary moral obligations, grounded upon a belief that Christians were raised into a state which was superior to them, is equally certain. There are two passages in the *Stromata* of Clemens which illustrate the teaching of the Nicolaitanes. From the first (Book II. c. xx. § 118), it would appear that the sect had construed a phrase of the master whose name they assumed respecting the contempt (or abuse) of the flesh, in a sense contrary to that which he intended; that what was asceticism in him became libertinism in them. The second passage intimates (c. xxiv. § 25) that the ascetical profession of the founder was connected with a practical arrogance and indifference to the most sacred obligations, which might well account for the subsequent deductions from it. Those deductions, according to Clemens, amounted to a justification of concubinage if not of a community of wives. The narratives are derived from an uncertain tradition, and are not quite perspicuous. But they have an internal probability; in different forms the same history has been repeated again and again.

I do not see that it is necessary to assume the existence of a school or sect of Balaamites. He who would not in words curse the children of Israel, who could only bless them, and yet did Balak's work far more effectually by setting a temptation before them which undermined their moral strength, is the precursor and type of all who, accepting and proclaiming the spiritual lessons of the higher covenant, should make them into excuses for encouraging the fleshly licence which enervates and destroys the spirit. So far the Nicolaitane and the Balaamite are alike. The distinctive features of the latter are two. (1.) He



has an inspiration, he is not a pretended, but a real prophet. He turns an actual gift to a vile use. (2.) The motive to his evil is money. Indulgence of lust is the result to his victims. Covetousness has slain *him*.

Like the Nicolaitanes and the Balaamites, the Prophetess of Thyatira sets herself above law. Like the latter, she enthrones her spiritual intuitions. But power, not liberty, is her aspiration. Her prototype is the Sidonian Jezebel who broke down the righteous laws of Jehovah; who set up the worship of Baalim, the powers of nature; who changed the Israelites into Phœnician idolaters, and so into a degraded, filthy people. Such female usurpation is as directly connected with sensual worship, and with all the consequences to which that worship leads, as the doctrine of the male prophet. It leads *more* directly to tyranny.

3. The adoption of names borrowed from the Old Testament to designate two out of three of these heresies is proof, I think, that they did not present themselves to the Apostle as essentially new. He was sure that they had existed and borne fruit ages before. They appeared in the Church because the Church consisted of men and women; because no new race had been called into existence to people it. That one which had a modern name, which was of post-Pentecostal origin, was like the others in its nature and in its effects. It did, however, bear witness to the fulfilment of the old covenant; to the baptism with the Spirit. By doing so it explained how that conflict between the flesh and the spirit, which had existed in all earlier times, had now reached its fullest strength. All questions now resolved themselves into the question, What has been done for men by the illumination

of the Divine Spirit? Has it set them free from restraints which were imposed upon their evil natures; or has it explained the meaning and blessing of those restraints? Has it opened to them visions of the heavenly world which make their doings on earth indifferent? Or has it given a significance to all the common occupations of earth? Has it constituted those who receive it into tyrants, or has it made them more obedient, and therefore more free? If this be so, then, instead of limiting these Nicolaitane, Balaamite, Jezebel tendencies and tempers to the Apostolical period, we shall expect to see them developing themselves from the little seeds in Pergamos and Thyatira into portentous diseases, which would infect the life of the Church in all regions, which, if the Church should obtain influence over the nations, would infect *them*, would weaken and corrupt *their* powers and threaten *their* existence.

These consequences, which we should suppose must be, if these messages were true and Divine, have, it seems to me, actually presented themselves in the history of Christendom. The Nicolaitane communism has been continually reappearing in the most various forms, and at the most unexpected moments. The Balaam prophet, who speaks grand words, and sets the example of foul acts, flattering the spirit with its own greatness till it sinks under the dominion of the animal or covetous desires, has never been wanting in small communities—has influenced countries and generations. The Jezebel, or female form of wickedness, mingling with the others, has given birth to the most widely spread idolatries; to systems of spiritual despotism, so perplexing, from their variety and their apparent opposition, that the successive reformers who

have struggled against them have seemed to others, and even to themselves, as if they were fighting under different banners, and aiming at opposite results. But they have been of one heart and one mind, inasmuch as they have borne witness that morality is immutable, that the righteous God cannot dispense with His own laws. And when they have been wise and successful, they have been alike in this respect also, that they have never hoped to overcome spiritual delusions by weakening their testimony to a Spirit of Peace and Love, and a Sound Mind; that they have traced the evil about them not to the belief in His Presence, but to the denial of it.

III. 1. This last lesson respecting the treatment of falsehood is contained in the message to the Church at Ephesus. The Angel of the Church had a great horror of religious pretenders: "*Thou canst not bear them that are evil.*" Nor had he only zeal, he had discernment: "*Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.*" Moreover, he spared no toil: "*Thou hast borne, and hast patience.*" And this too from real devotion: "*For my sake thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*" And as for that particular sect which has done so much mischief: "*Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*" For all this clearness and vigour of purpose, He who walks in the midst of the candlesticks, and holds the stars in His hand, commends His servant. And yet an evil change is discovered in him: "*Thou hast left thy first love.*" The outward activity is there. Thy heart is gone. Thy service has become, and is becoming, not dishonest, but mechanical. He who looks within knows that it is so. And He calls thee to repent; He whose

call, if thou heedest it, is the gift of repentance. But if thou dost not repent, if the indifference and coldness grow to be deadly, then this is the punishment : "*I will remove thy candlestick out of its place.*" It has been set to give light. Thou art failing to give it. Men see thee active in repressing evil opinions, and going punctually through a round of duties. But the life and love of good do not proceed from thee. Therefore thou must not pretend to be that which thou art not. Ephesus must cease to be a Church, if it does not fulfil the one function of a Church. This temptation, then, thou hast to overcome ; not the temptation of persecution, not the temptation to heresy, but dreariness, formality, the worship of decorum. Fight against this in the strength of Him who is walking in the midst of the candlesticks. And He will give thee just what thou wantest ; the fruit of the tree of life ; that fruit which has power to prevail against all tendencies in thee to torpor and death.

2. In Pergamos it is different. He who has "*the sword with two edges,*" who fights not only with outward foes, but with the subtle, secret enemy, that undermines the heart within, saw that the Church, which was brave enough when it was called to bear witness against Jewish or heathen oppressors, was becoming infected with Balaamite and Nicolaitane corruptions, and that the angel was not courageously resisting them. They had, no doubt, crept into his own heart. He was not clearly distinguishing *there* between the liberty of the spirit and the licence of the flesh ; he was not hating the last that he might cherish the first. Therefore he could not contend with them in his flock. But the Son of Man is contending with them in both. He can over-

come them in both. And if the angel will let that two-edged sword do its work, this shall be his reward. He shall eat of the hidden manna which restores the spirit that the flesh-pots of Egypt have weakened. He shall have the white stone of Absolution, the true spiritual emancipation which the Balaamite and Nicolaitane emancipation has counterfeited. On the stone "*shall be written a new name, which no man knoweth save he which receiveth it.*" The Divine liberty is not imparted in his own name, but in Christ's name. The regenerated spirit accepts its freedom in that name; it knows that it has His name, though it cannot make any one understand how it has got that name. It stands fast in Christ's liberty, the liberty of doing God's will, of giving up itself.

3. In Thyatira, again, He "*who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass,*" He who sees into the heart of things, and looks through all appearances, who has Himself passed through the furnace of human temptations, sees how much good there is in the angel and the Church, "*what charity, and service, and faith, and patience, and the last works to be more than the first.*" There is life; there is growth; evils have been vanquished; where failure had been, there is success. But he sees evil working here; evil of the same inward, penetrating kind, as in the other case.

The angel suffers the woman Jezebel to draw away the servants of Christ "*to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.*" He is evidently afraid of her spiritual pretensions. He dares not rebuke one who regards herself as a great saint, and whom many of his flock follow under that character. He has not learnt that the spirit which exalts itself above law is the spirit of Lucifer; that those depths of wisdom

which lead to moral corruption, and to a tampering with idolatry, let them be honoured with what religious epithets they may, are depths of Satan. But if the angel is timid, if he dares not exercise discrimination and judgment, there is another who will lay bare sins which pass under seemly names, who will let it be known what gross and open crimes spring from spiritual self-exaltation. So I interpret the fearful threatening to this Church ; fulfilled to it I cannot doubt ; fulfilled again and again in particular Churches, and in the Church at large when the Jezebel temper has become rampant.

Can the promise also have been fulfilled? "*He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers : even as I received of my Father. And I will give unto him the morning star.*" The temptation to be overcome is the temptation to covet heathen privileges and heathen power ; to tamper with heathen opinions and practices for the sake of winning it. The hook has been wonderfully baited ; not to nibble at it was very hard in the primitive times, has been very hard ever since. What is the encouragement to cast it wholly aside ? If you do, you shall have the power you are seeking ; power over those to whom you are asked to give up yourselves ; a power which they shall confess ; a power which shall break in pieces their corruptions and superstitions ; a power which shall be the same in kind with that which I have received from my Father. Now this is a promise which I am sure was performed to that Church at Thyatira, and to its angel, and has been performed to every Church since, so far as it has



struggled with this most subtle evil and conquered it. Every society which has maintained its own moral standing-ground, which has refused to win power and influence by stooping to the practices of those who surround it, has been permitted in marvellous ways to elevate them, to reform the nations, to make them confess that Christ's kingdom is no dream. In the least circle, this assertion is verified; it is established by all the real dominion which the Church has exercised over the world; by the conquests it has won from the world. It has been established as completely by its own abominable tyrannies over the world, by the tyrannies it has kept alive in the world, by the defeats it has sustained from the world. Grasping at the promise, Ye shall rule them "*with a rod of iron*"—only forgetting the clause, "*as I have received from my Father*"—the Church has misused her rod to crush the spirits which Christ came from the Father to raise; to protect and aggravate the cruelty and oppression which He came to break into shivers. And what has been the recompense? The wretched power which she had wrenched and stolen from the nations has been turned against her. She has been obliged to crouch to them, and beg their help, and they have justly spurned her. She has chosen to exalt herself like Lucifer, and she has fallen like Lucifer. If she had trusted her Lord, He would have given her the morning star. She should have derived from Him what she claimed independently of Him. She should have dispensed light to the world. She should have shouted for joy with all the sons of God.

4. If we thus take these messages as applying directly to the Churches of Asia, they have, it seems to me, the most powerful application to all times; the

most stinging application to ourselves. Is there one of these early heresies to which we are not liable? Are we exempt from any Antinomian peril, from the peril of turning spiritual imaginations, and even spiritual realities, into an excuse for self-indulgence and self-glorification?

But perhaps it surprises us even more to read the messages to Sardis and to Laodicea, when we connect them with the history of bodies which we suppose must have had all the dews of youth upon them, than even to hear of startling moral corruptions such as are denounced in the others. For here we have all the signs which we connect with what is senile and effete; or with the indifference, effeminacy, self-satisfaction, which ease and luxury engender. The Sardian "*has a name that he lives and is dead.*" He must "*strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die.*" The Laodicean is "*neither hot nor cold.*" He says that he is "*rich, and increased with goods,*" and knows not that he is "*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" Often has this language been used in pulpits to show what a contrast there is between the primitive times and these, how far we have fallen below the blessed age of which the New Testament speaks to us. And the admonition has been felt to have a force; it has gone home to the consciences of many; it has stirred some to repentance and reformation. Why? I think, brethren, because the language itself is so much truer, and mightier, and simpler, than the preacher's interpretation of it. His golden age has no existence. Christ's revelation of facts scatters the dream. But that revelation tells the Sardian that he has the seven Spirits which quicken, and the seven stars that enlighten. And those Spirits can quicken what is ready

to die now as well as then ; and those stars can illumine what is dark now as well as then. Christ's revelation tells the Sardian that all who overcome "*shall be clothed in white raiment ;*" that what is evil shall be blotted out, that their names "*shall not be blotted out of the book of life,*" but He "*will confess them before his Father, and before the angels.*" In such a sentence lies an imperishable power ; those white robes of innocence, that power to stand before God and call Him a Father, we need as much as the generations of old. And since it is held out not to those who are full of faith, and energy, and hope, but to those whose works were feeble, who had only a name to live ; we may have a courage to take it home ; in us it may be accomplished. Christ's revelation tells the Laodicean that He is the "*Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God,*" and that "*as many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens,*" and that "*he stands at the door and knocks,*" and that "*if any hears his voice and opens the door, he will come to him, and sup with him,*" and that "*to him that overcometh he will grant to sit with him on his throne, even as he has overcome, and sat down with his Father on his throne.*" Such words contain an undying message to those who are beginning to discover their nakedness, and blindness, and wretchedness. They are an assurance that for them also gold is to be had which has been tried in the fire, and white raiment with which they may be clothed, and eye-salve with which they may see.

5. And so the brightest vision of all among these Churches—the only one which is very bright—ceases to be any longer a vision of some bygone period which owed its felicity to a state of circumstances that can never return. The angel of the Church of the Philadelphians had only "*a little strength,*" and because he

knew that he had only that little, he kept "*Christ's word, and did not deny his name.*" Whilst those who called themselves Jews would not believe that the Son of David could be the Son of Man, while they claimed an exclusive Messiah who should glorify them and condemn the world, he would not deny that glorious name, he believed in One who came to die for the world and to redeem it. Amidst all apparent difficulties and contradictions he kept the word of Christ's patience, believing that He would show Himself at last to be what He had declared Himself to be; that His cross should be found to be the conquering power in the world, the central sun which should draw all to it. Therefore, "*He that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth,*" promises to keep this servant and this Church "*from the temptation which should come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*" What this temptation was, and how true the promise was in the next verse, "*Behold, I come quickly,*" I believe we shall learn as we study this book more. And the more we learn it, and the more we believe it, the less shall we think that any promise of His has worn itself out, or that He Himself has departed from us; the more shall we ask to understand the full force of those words which this Apocalypse was written to explain to the Philadelphians and to us: "*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name.*"

## LECTURE IV.

### THE VISION OF HEAVEN.

After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven : and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me ; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the Spirit : and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone : and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats : and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment ; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices : and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal : and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within : and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.—REV. iv.

THE messages to the seven Churches are concluded.  
What they needed was the revelation of a Son of Man,

dwelling in the midst of them, the Source of their illumination, the Judge of their inward state, their Purifier and Restorer. He who wrote down the words which the Spirit spoke to them, required more to prepare *him* for the crisis that was approaching. In the vision of a Prince of the kings of the earth, something was implied which all should desire to look into, which those must look into who were to be the teachers of their time, the prophets of another generation. If they were content to rest in the belief of a Friend of Man, they would bring Him down to their level; or else He would be too august and awful an object for their contemplation, and all inferior beings who partake more of their own weakness and errors would be dearer to them than He. So, when a great shock disturbed the ordinary routine of their lives, they would find themselves without a standing ground. The faith which for a time had elevated and purified them, would look as if it were only *their* faith or *their* imagination. All things would reel and totter about them, and they would reel and totter with the rest.

I. Therefore the Old Testament teaches us that the preparation for any great critical period of Jewish history, was a discovery of God Himself as the foundation of the nation's order and existence. I have spoken already in these lectures, as I have often spoken in this place before, of that revelation to Moses of the "*I AM*," as the one pillar of the law and freedom of Israel, which fitted him for his work. To-day I must speak of two other passages, which, apart from their own importance and interest, are necessary for the interpretation of the chapter before us. "*In the year that King Uzziah died*," so we read in the sixth chapter of the Prophecy of Isaiah, "*I saw also the Lord sitting*



*upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."*

Here we have the revelation, to a man sitting in Solomon's temple, of the meaning and reality of the symbols which were there. That which he saw with his eyes betokened a living and spiritual world which he could not see, but by which he was surrounded. A king was dying or dead; a king was about to succeed who would bring idol worship into that very temple, and in whose days there would be an invasion of Syrians, and a more formidable invasion of Assyrians. The earthquake would be terrible; the nation would be shaken to its centre. The life of it would seem to have perished within; the sentence, "*Cut it down,*" to be coming from without. But the issues of events were not dependent upon Ahaz, or Shalmaneser, or Sennacherib. The permanence of the nation was not dependent upon the permanence of its signs or forms. There was a Divine King and a Divine order beneath all and above all. He was holy, whatever else was unholy. There was right at the foundation of things, however power might seem to trample upon right. God had His ministers surrounding Him, who set forth His nature, and fulfilled His purposes. If Israel utterly failed to be His minister, these would not fail. But there was a pledge in them that Israel would not fail, however its kings or priests might. The nation would live on,

and do its work till the work was accomplished. Isaiah, knowing this, could be a prophet. He could speak to kings, and priests, and people, of their unbelief in this Divine King, and of the miseries which that unbelief had brought and would bring upon them. He could testify that there was a Will higher than their self-will, which would at last prevail against it.

II. Isaiah is often called the evangelical prophet, the prophet of the Christ who was to be born of the Virgin and manifested upon earth. It is therefore the more important to remember that his prophecy does not start from this point, that its ground is laid in the revelation of a King living for ever and ever. The other instance is taken from a later period of the history, from a far darker period. Ezekiel is sitting astonished by the river Chebar. He is a captive among captives. The Babylonian has laid waste his land. The capital is dragging on a dreary existence under a king whom Nebuchadnezzar has set over it. The temple of his fathers is soon to perish ; and he is surrounded by strange sights, by strange forms of idolatry. Some of those sculptures with the character of which we have lately become familiar, may have been before his eyes ; at all events they were not far from him. His people, already used to vulgarer shapes of Egyptian or Phœnician worship, would turn to those which the world's rulers had fashioned, with a strange fascination. There were all forms of animal power, the lion and the eagle conspicuous over the rest. There was the god-king, with his keen eye for conquest and destruction. There was the chariot in which he went forth to battle, or led home his procession of captives. There were the wings which seemed to witness that he

and these animals belonged to another region than the earth. How wonderful was the combination of all these forms ! Was not the Lord God of Israel, He of whom no similitude might be made, overpowered, when to all these similitudes the rulers of the earth, the subduers of the chosen people, did homage ? *"It came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. And I looked, and behold a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance ; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides ; and they four had their faces and their wings. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side ; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side ; they four also had the face of an eagle."* A vision of God ! Yes, these Babylonian images have not banished Him from His own creation. They are parts of His own creation. They are bearing witness of Him one and all. The lion, the ox, the eagle, all set forth some aspect of His power and His work. This chariot in which the tyrant is sitting, the chariot which goes forth to scatter ruin and death, is not after all the conquering chariot. There are wheels which are higher than its wheels. There are wheels in the midst of which a spirit is moving. There is an order of life and not of death. And these wheels will at last drive over all that resists them. And Bel will bow down, and Nebo will stoop ; and those that lead

into captivity will go into captivity. And on the throne is the likeness as of a man, not of a brute or a tyrant. And as there was light at first unfolding itself out of a cloud and of a whirlwind; so this was the end of the vision: "*As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*"

By such a revelation of the powers of nature and art delivered from their inversion and restored to their right place in the Divine harmony—by such a vision of a Being at the centre of all, awful not from excess of darkness, but of light—was the solitary exile prepared to endure the tribulations of that time; to be a witness to His people concerning their idolatries and heathenism; to be the prophet of a restored temple and a regenerated society.

III. And so it is with the greater teacher, the latest Apostle. He had drunk in those earlier revelations, and needed a higher revelation that he might be able to sustain the pressure of his present and coming sorrow. For him in the isle of Patmos, as for Ezekiel by the river of Chebar, a door was opened in heaven. And that trumpet-voice which he heard before, awakening him to confess the Son of Man who was walking among the candlesticks, bids him come up higher, that he may know what is to be hereafter. That trumpet now, as before, is addressed not to his outward, but to his spiritual ear. Straightway he is in the spirit, seeking to know that which endures and abides, that which will not change when all things that he sees change. "*And behold a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.*" A throne there had been in Isaiah's vision; it told of the King who lived on, when Uzziah

and one king after another died. A throne there had been in Ezekiel's vision. It told of a King who ruled in righteousness; when monarchs of Israel and of Babylon were ruling in unrighteousness, magnifying power above righteousness. St. John has greater necessities. The kingdom of Israel is gone. The temple in which Isaiah sat, which was in Ezekiel's time to perish and rise again, had been finally doomed. And a god-emperor mightier than the Babylonian declared the world and its glory to be his. The old Asiatic thrones, the republics of Greece, the republic of Rome itself, had sunk beneath his feet. Was there any other throne beside his? Was it only *his* raised to omnipotence? A Person is here; real as he on the throne of the Cæsars, no abstraction, no phantom of cloud or air. But "*He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone.*" It is not a revelation of crushing power, but of perfect, untroubled brightness, of light with no darkness at all. That which was coming forth in Ezekiel's vision through the whirlwind and cloud is presented to the New Testament seer as the home and resting-place of his spirit. But he has lost nothing which was given to his forerunner: "*There was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*" The sardine stone does not enclose its light within itself. The light must be diffused in different rays; there must be variety in the unity.

IV. I do not like to change the words. I feel how miserable are all efforts to make them simpler. I only want that we should all let them sink into our hearts and scatter the notions and fancies which linger there; the dreary conceptions of grandeur and divinity which we form for ourselves. We know not

how much these are derived from the vulgarest associations of earthly pomp; yes, and of mere brute force. Be sure that we cannot rid ourselves of them by merely determining that our heaven shall have no resemblance to earth. It *will* have resemblance to earth; if you make one heaven which is utterly apart from earth, you will have another which is fashioned from the elements of it; and that is the one you will believe in. What you want is, not a heaven separated from earth, but one which shall explain its confusions and perplexities, instead of being constructed out of them; which shall show you how the forms of earth are the images of its forms, instead of being their archetypes. You want to have a door opened in heaven that you may not have an earth given up to oppression and cruelty. Keep this thought in mind while you read the next sentences in this chapter: "*And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*" You have often observed, as you have read the first book of the Iliad, how nearly the council of chiefs to which you are introduced at the commencement, answers to the council of gods with which it closes. There are disputes in both: that on Olympus you say is a glorified likeness of that in the Greek ships. I believe, in the main, the criticism is right. I would only ask you to consider what would become of all that you admire and ought to admire in Homer if there were *no* such glorified likeness; if you had simply the earthly heroes without the beings from whom they were said to be derived. You would lose the poetry, of course; I believe you would also lose the truth of the poem. The earth



would become utterly dreary and bare; you would feel that the men could not be what they aspired to be—could not attain the stature which they felt they ought to attain—if the sense of presences superior to themselves and not far from them were withdrawn. But, if this is the truth, where comes in the falsehood? I have endeavoured to show where it comes in. If the standard of the council above is in any degree derived from the standard of the council below—if the poet, wishing to regard the gods as the sources of the law and justice which he finds among men, begins to measure this law and justice by ours—then confusion must enter. We are deeply grateful to the great singer for enabling us to perceive it; his simplicity and honesty are the greatest helps to our discovery of that which hinders him from being wholly simple and true; we are sure that God must have been teaching men who had such intuitions of Him as this Greek and his countrymen possessed. So much the more do we crave that He should tell us what He is; whether there is a heavenly order such as men have dreamed of; whether it is unlike all that is most precious to us in the order of earth; if not, whether it must needs partake of the imperfection of that order.

V. Those who are seeking for objections to the Apocalypse may consider it a great discovery that the elders who are sitting on the twenty-four seats recall an institution of the Jewish commonwealth. To me it is a most obvious and a most welcome announcement. Instead of those hierarchies of angels, with which the writers in the Middle Ages peopled the heavenly world, I find the simple and beautiful revelation of a government and justice, which is the pattern

of the government and justice on earth. Forget the Centre of all, Him that sitteth on *the* throne, Him who is as the jasper and the sardine stone, and these four and twenty thrones bring in a polytheistic dream; a new form of natural or demigod worship. Unite them with that Centre as they are united in this vision, and there comes into the mind the calm feeling that these are ministers of the Perfect Ruler, who do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His words; in whom is no caprice and disobedience, no striving with laws, perfect freedom and joy in the performance of laws. There is a craving in us all for such a revelation as this; we become impatient even of the highest discoveries of science when we suppose it compels us to reverence mere laws of the universe, and to deny that the laws may be personally administered. That there is nothing in one of these convictions which really clashes with the other, I think we shall all one day learn. What we need is the assurance that the raiment of these Judges and Rulers is white; that there is not on them a stain of indulgence or favouritism; that they have the golden crowns of wisdom and righteousness which they gain by always contemplating Him who is perfectly righteous and wise: then we may rejoice that they rule the earth, because they have none of the baseness of earth.

VI. In the midst of that council of Greek gods sat the Thunderer. A grand image, surely; not without meaning; but certainly with very little of awfulness. The Israelite was taught that the thunders and lightnings which came forth from Sinai proceeded from the Lord his God, who had brought him out of the house of bondage. He trembled; but he was commanded to

trust in this God ; those who trusted in Him would not be confounded. “ *Out of the throne* ” which St. John saw, “ *proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices.* ” The perfect goodness and purity will wage war against all that is evil and dark. But there were also “ *seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.* ” That consuming fire which is in the lightning has another purpose than one of destruction. It is illuminating and life-giving. It comes forth from the Divine Being, the perfect Love ; those Spirits are filled with it ; they go forth to quicken and inspire all voluntary creatures. “ *And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.* ” The throne is not merely that from which commands issue. The glory of Him who sits upon it is to be imaged in His creatures ; what He is absolutely and entirely, they are to set forth in their different measures and relations.

VII. And now, therefore, we have the fuller unfolding of that vision which consoled Ezekiel in the land of captivity. There, in this heavenly world, are the exemplars of those different forms of power to which men have done homage on earth, which they have accepted as diverse representations of the Divine nature. “ *And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts,* ” or four living creatures, “ *full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.* ” You have here types of powers which you have met with in the worship and the art of all the great nations of the earth. The first Asiatic conqueror revered the strength of the lion ; it expressed to him the qualities which he most desired in the king, and supposed to be

most characteristic of the god. The useful animals, of which the calf was actually, as well as ideally, the representative, have commanded the awe of the Egyptian, and not less of the Hindoo. The Greek, still struggling with these animal conceptions, yet rises to the conception of a human figure and countenance which transcends them. The flying eagle symbolized to the Roman his aspiration for universal dominion. In each of these cases the idea of what was greatest in nature and in the unseen world strictly corresponded. There was indeed, as we have seen in the Assyrian worship, a confused blending together of these different instincts; none of them was wanting in any tribe of the earth; it is but gradually that we discern which of them was most governed by one, which by the other. But the great revelation to the latest seer, that which was to prepare him for the downfall of his own country's worship, and of the witness it had borne against all these idolatries, is that each had a meaning; that it was the perversion of a truth; that each animal form had its Divine significance, its celestial counterpart; that each of these had its eyes behind, which turned to Him who sat upon the throne, and caught the reflection of His light and purity; and its eyes before, which looked to the works of His hands. "*And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*" Here we have the wings that lifted up the living creatures, in the vision of the old prophet, signifying to him that whereof there had been a dim sense in the Assyrian sculptor, that all things in creation must have a tendency upwards as well as downwards. There is a spirit which carries them towards God, as

there is a nature which draws them towards earth. But here the downward tendency is overcome. They are continually ascending in higher circles; they have nearer glimpses of the eternal holiness and truth. The nearer the approach, the greater the awe; the greater the sense of distance. No ambition to climb, only to behold. An increasing discovery; an increasing adoration. To know truth in its diverse forms; to know it in its essential unity; to enter into a love which passeth knowledge, that it may go forth through them to the farthest ends of the universe;—here is the occupation, here is the aspiration of celestial Natures. But this beholding of truth, this entering into the joy of the Lord, does not exclude that other occupation of judging and governing which our Lord promised His disciples, when He said, “He that hath used his five talents faithfully shall have rule over five cities.” And the work is part of the worship. *“And when these beasts give glory, and honour, and thanks to him that sitteth upon the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”*

VIII. Oftentimes it has been said in Christian pulpits, that heaven is but the continuance of the worship upon earth. Those who have found that worship on earth very dreary and unsatisfactory, have said that they should prefer any Greek Elysium or Gothic Walhalla to such a heaven. I think if we take St. John as our guide—if we accept his revelation as the true revelation—we may see a meaning in

the assertion of the divine, and a meaning in the protest of the layman. All is worship there, because all are pursuing the highest good in contemplation and action; because all are referring their thoughts and acts to one centre, instead of scattering and dispersing them by turning to a thousand different centres; because each thinker and each doer is forgetting himself in the object which he has before him, in the work which is committed to him. But if the teacher supposes that there is any monotony of employment there; that any one grave, earnest task which has occupied the student here will be cast aside or broken off there; that any serious work in which men are engaged has not that which corresponds to it and fulfils it there; I would bid him consider well this opening of heaven to the Apostle, and correct by it his own fancies and speculations. The four living creatures, we shall find, are concerning themselves with all the movements and changes in the moral world; the very name of elders denotes that they are exercising the functions and faculties of judgment and direction over spiritual beings and over natural agents. Our worship must always be dreary, if it stands aloof from our daily life; if it does not interpret and transfigure that life. The heavenly worship is continuous only because growth in knowledge is continuous, and because all free action is continuous. In the many mansions there is room for every form of life; only the shapes of death can be excluded.

IX. I say, then, we have here the Christian Elysium, or Walhalla, or Paradise, that which you are all looking for when your thoughts are calmest and truest; when you are most tormented by the discords



of the world around you, and of your own hearts; when you are most sure there must be a harmony without discords; when you long for scope to complete tasks which death will leave unfinished; when you wish to recover affections which have been broken; to know what you have been unable to know; to work bravely; to rest without ceasing to work. "I go," said Hooker on his death-bed—and the words thrill through me more than all the ecstatic phrases that have been reported of such seasons—"I go to a world of order." It was such a world—I have said already, and we shall find it more hereafter—that St. John was driven to seek by the tumults which were rending in pieces the world around him. Is Nero, is Vitellius, the King of kings, the Lord of lords? that was the question he had to ask himself. And this was the answer. He found that the kingdom of heaven, of which his Master had spoken to him as they sat in the ship, and to crowds of people besides him, was indeed a real kingdom; not far off in some distant star; connected by closest relations, by common pursuits and interests, with all that was passing here. It was much to know this; but he who knows so much must crave to know more. What binds together this calm life with our restless life? How can one be brought to act upon the other and to reform it? Will He who sits on that heavenly throne restore those children of earth who are trampled beneath the tyrant that is sitting on the earthly throne? These questions connect the vision of to-day with that which I hope to consider next Sunday; the vision of the book that was sealed with seven seals, and of the Lamb who prevailed to open it.

## LECTURE V.

### THE BOOK WITH SEVEN SEALS.

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and

glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.—REV. v.

FOR awhile St. John might be glad to forget all that he had witnessed of strife and turbulence, in that vision of peace and order. For he knew it was real. That which was shifting and changeable might be fantastic; this could not be. It was the substance which was implied in those vicissitudes. It derived nothing from the mind of the beholder, it imparted steadfastness to his mind. The revelation of a throne upon which sat One in whom was light and no darkness, justice and no caprice, of forms which reflected that light, of rulers who executed that justice, must have been very calming to the spirit of a seer, who had a little before been contemplating the unsteady flickerings of those candlesticks which had been set upon the earth, the imperfect government of those angels who were exhibiting something of the Divine righteousness. But if the prophet could forget the earth in gazing upon heaven, these heavenly powers could not. He who sat on the throne could not. Were the thrones below to confess this throne; or to make a dominion of their own, independent of it, contrary to it? If they were to obey it, what was to produce the obedience? Could it be wrought by a decree? Could rebel *wills* yield to that?

I. "*And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*" It signifies little what name we give to this book. We may call it the Doomsday Book; the book which contains and interprets human

history ; the book which claims the kingdoms of the earth for God. Each of these titles will justify itself as we proceed ; the contents of the book will tell us better what it is than any anticipations of ours. What St. John cares that we should know at once, is that He'who to look upon was like a jasper or a sardine stone, held it in His right hand. He knew what was in it. It was the expression of His purpose and will. The belief that there is such a book in such a hand has sustained the strongest, sternest minds among men ; it has enabled them to endure the world's despair and their own. Those who have spoken of an unbending, irresistible, irreversible fate, have had a sense of this truth, even when they have darkened it most. They have meant more than they could utter or than they knew. There has been a right hand in their terrible abstraction ; a Divine will beneath that which has looked like a denial of all will. The stoical acquiescence in a mere necessity expands in the hymn of Cleanthes into the recognition of a Providence over the deeds and thoughts of men ; passes even into the confession of a deliverer and a friend, in the meditations of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. But these wise men thought that the scroll could never be unrolled. To bear what was appointed them was their only wisdom. A deep wisdom, if it could be known what *was* appointed ; if it could be known what He who appointed was doing, that men might not work as mere servants of a power to which they must yield, but as children of a Father who would train them to be like himself.

II. It was not the will of Him who sat on the throne, so St. John learned, that the book should be a closed one. “ *And I saw a strong angel proclaiming*

*with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"* Oftentimes when there is an effort made by students upon earth to investigate the anomalies which they find around them, behind them, before them, we check them with a warning against their vanity and presumption. Who can look into the secrets of the All-wise; who can struggle with the Omnipotent? My friends! there may be a right meaning in such admonitions; I have confessed that there is. In a heathen teacher they should be accepted with gratitude as signs of an awe which he did not learn in an idol temple; though one would be sorry not to meet in him also with earnest cries for a solution of the riddle which he sometimes treats as insoluble. But we ought to ask ourselves seriously, whether it may not be an inspiration from above and not from beneath, which urges men to smite the bars of their prison, and to try whether there may be no hidden passage which leads out of it. That cry upon earth is the echo, so St. John says, of a voice in heaven. A strong angel bade his own fellows put forth their strength and see whether they could not break the seals.

III. "*And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.*"

Many will complain of our translators for rendering οὐδεὶς "no man" when the scene is in heaven, and the persons spoken of are heavenly powers. It was an unnecessary and wilful outrage upon appearances which they would have been wiser to avoid. But I believe the mistake is by no means a serious one. *We* make a vast chasm between the angelic and the human natures; partly because the former is to us nearly

fantastic; partly because we deduce our idea of the latter from the Fall. The writer of the Apocalypse, as I have observed already, often seems to confound them. The messenger of God, whether subject to death or free from it, is still to be denoted by a common name. It defines his character and function; whether he fulfils that character and function or not, he can have no higher, except it be that filial one which belongs to the beggar in rags, no less than to the seraphim. All depends upon the question, whom we take to be the head of every man—the first Adam or the second.

These remarks are needful for the illustration of the whole passage before us, even more than of the particular verse. Whatever may be the superiority of angelic powers to mortal—whatever exemption heavenly powers may enjoy from the calamities of earth—that superiority and that exemption did not qualify them to open this book and to look in it. The book of God must be read by some one who had a perfect apprehension of the mind of God. The book of the earth's victory must be read by one who had a perfect apprehension of the earth's conflict.

IV. "*And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.*" I spoke of the peace which the revelation of that world of order must have imparted to the prophet. Thank God! such peace was not all that he wanted; if more was not given, it could not endure. The pity and tenderness, you will say, of the child of earth came forth in his weeping; rather, I would say, the pity and the tenderness of the child of God. He could not be content till he knew more of the destinies of his own race, because the Father



of that race would not allow him to be content. The question whether justice and truth were to reign *here*, whether injustice and untruth were to be put down, concerned him, doubtless, most deeply. But he knew *how much* it concerned him when he held converse with those who are above the smoke of the earth, when the One who was to look upon like jasper and sardine stone was unveiled to him. Then it became intolerable pain, that no one should be worthy to open and read the book.

V. "*And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not : behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.*" "The Lion of the tribe of Judah ! the Root of David !" What a fall ! A little while ago we were hearing of the heavenly world ; of the throne, and the rainbow, and the sea of glass, and the seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God. A great fall assuredly, if there is *not* a fellowship between heaven and earth. A great fall, if we associate spiritual power with the great and not with the little. No fall, if the very subject of this vision, and of this book, is the union of heaven and earth ; the establishment of the dominion of heaven over the earth. No fall, if spiritual power is magnified through weakness ; if its true manifestation is in the triumph over animal bulk and numerical vastness. The lion was of old the symbol of the tribe of Judah. That tribe, representing the nation to which it belonged, was raised up to show how one might chase a thousand, how two might put ten thousand to flight ; because it possessed a secret of strength which Egyptian and Babylonian monarchs had not. David, the youngest son, the shepherd, the stripling, the

outlaw, was the witness that God had set his King on the holy hill of Zion. What name so fit to express the spiritual conqueror, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah? What name more fit to indicate the true source and ground of all power than the Root of David? Those names belonged to all the early associations of the aged exile; they made him understand that he was never a truer Jew than when he was witnessing for the Prince of all the kings of the earth. They showed him by what Divine links the records of that people, which was about to be a people no longer, were connected with the deliverance of mankind.

VI. For who was the Lion of the tribe of Judah? Where lay that secret of the strength which belonged to no other in heaven or in earth?

*“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.”*

The Lion of the tribe of Judah is the Lamb that was slain. Here is that revelation of power perfected in weakness, manifested in submission, for which all the previous history of mankind had been a preparation. Here is that reconciliation of the highest with the lowest, of dominion with suffering, of life with death, which can alone explain the riddle of the universe, which can alone satisfy the infinite doubts by which men have been racked and are racked; yes, and must be, unless they close their eyes to facts, or sink into stolid indifference.

How shall that absolute purity and truth which is like a jasper or sardine stone be brought within the

range of a creature's contemplation? It may be worshipped at a distance, it may be seen in some of its outward exercises. But this is not enough for those who are created in the Divine image, for those who demand truth and purity themselves. "*In the midst of the throne is the Lamb that was slain.*" Purity and truth are not seen in some broken mirror; in divided forms; but fully, altogether. In that act of perfect self-sacrifice, of entire oblation, of surrender to death, all that angels are seeking for comes forth. It is not adapted or reduced to meet their needs or their feebleness; in meeting those needs and that feebleness, the full, unmeasured Divine perfection and glory appear; every veil which hid them is taken away. He is also "*in the midst of the elders.*" Those twenty-four seats whence go forth the righteous judgments upon voluntary beings, which direct the movements of natural agents:—these express that mind which is in the Lamb. Through all the universe the same principle of self-sacrifice, which is the law of His acts, is at work to govern and renew. "*He is in the midst of the four living creatures.*" The lion, the calf, the man, the eagle—the different forms of power which men had worshipped, had *each* its heavenly prototype; some aspect of the Divine nature was presented to each, and exhibited in each. But these creatures have here their centre; the Lamb which was slain makes each capable of its own function; makes each efficient to the end for which they are all working; binds them to that throne from which mortal idolatry severed them. "*He has seven horns.*" Those powers which, when they are divorced from self-sacrifice, are irregular and discordant, are harmonised in Him. Each has its own quality; none clashes with the other; there is no uniformity in

their movements, but free and living unity. He has the "*seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*" That sense of an eye over the greatest and the minutest *events* in the world's history, which leads us to speak of Providence—a noble word if we allowed it to retain its signification, and did not turn it into a feeble substitute for the living Being who exercises it; that sense of an eye over the thoughts and intents of our *hearts*, which leads us to speak of a scrutiny and judgment that none may escape; have both their full justification here. Only the language of the Apocalypse is far clearer, brighter, more corresponding to the facts of our experience, than that which we are wont to use. We want an expression which shall tell us that each king and each man is subject to a distinct Providence, to a distinct judgment, and yet that it is the same for all and in all. We want an expression which shall denote that the eyes are not merely penetrating and scrutinising, but quickening; that if they bring the evil in us to light, they also discover and impart a good which can scatter it. "*The seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*" gives us such an expression; if we connect it, as the Apostle does, with Him whose they are; if we believe that the orderer of our lives, the searcher of our hearts, is the Lamb that was slain.

Here, then, is the New Testament revelation, answering to and fulfilling that Old Testament revelation of the Lion of Judah—which was to overthrow the destructive lion, the brute tyranny, of the world—of the Root of David, who was to set up a kingdom of righteousness instead of a kingdom of self-will. The discovery that the highest Godhead is manifested in self-sacrifice; that all power, angelic or human, has this

ground; that all power which does not confess this ground is disorderly and rebellious, and doomed to perish; this is the gospel which the Cross of Christ preaches to mankind; it is this doctrine in its most transcendent and universal form, which this chapter of the Apocalypse brings before us.

VII. "*And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne.*"

He is able to unroll the book of the Divine purposes; to break those seals which have made it unintelligible to men; to show what is to last in the universe, what to decay; to show what men may acquiesce and rest in; what they are to resist to the death. He is able to explain whether any hope that wise and brave men have ever cherished for the world is destined to disappointment; or whether they hoped too feebly, and the fruition is to be beyond the dream. Such is the prospect before us. The Apocalypse is to speak of all these things. If we will attend to its words and not put our own in place of them, I believe it will give us light and satisfaction upon all.

VIII. But before we advance let me lead you to think for a few moments upon the passage which is under our notice this afternoon. It may help, I think, to correct an opinion which is widely diffused in the Christian world, which must more or less infect us all, and which must be fatal to any of the lessons that the Revelation of St. John would teach us. The Lamb is said here to prevail to *open* the book of the Divine purposes. We often suppose that He prevailed by His sacrifice to *alter* those purposes. We often say that the Divine will, or justice, or purity, demanded something of man which he could not render; that he was doomed to destruction for that failure; that the Lamb interposed to avert this

sentence; that He paid the creature's debt; that so He satisfied the mind of Him who sat on the throne. That many threads are woven into this theory which are drawn from the practical faith of men, from their experience of their own wants, from the lessons they have learnt in Scripture; I gladly own. But that that practical faith has suffered, and does suffer cruelly, from the speculations which have been mixed with it; that the hearts of men crave for a satisfaction which this scheme of divinity does not afford them; that if they would listen to the teaching of Scripture, they would find that satisfaction; I must maintain also. How naturally men conscious of evil wish to change the purpose of a Power which they think is ready to punish this evil; how eagerly they seek for mediators, who they suppose may effect this change; how they may arrive at last at the conception of a Kehama, who by prayers and sacrifice can bend the will of the gods wholly to *his* will; the mythology of all nations proves abundantly. Christian theology scatters such dark imaginations, by revealing the Highest Ruler as the All-good, Him who sits on the throne as a Being like a jasper or a sardine stone to look upon; by revealing the Lamb that was slain as the perfect sharer of His counsels; the perfect fulfiller of His will; the perfect revealer of His designs to mankind; the perfect Redeemer of the world from the dominion of false, hateful, cruel gods which they had imagined, and which upheld all falsehood, hatred, cruelty in the rulers; the perfect Atoner of man with the Father of Light, in whom is no variableness nor the shadow of turning.

This, I think you will find, is the spirit of that song which the prophet heard in his lonely island. "*And when He had taken the book, the four beasts and*



*four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth."* We have here a grand confession from those elders who represent the law of the world that the Lamb is the author of that law, and has perfectly fulfilled it, not set it aside or changed its operation in the least degree; from the living creatures who represent the Divine nature that the Lamb has perfectly manifested it, and has in no respect given it a new feeling or direction. The vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints, are the cries that have gone up from all the sorrowers and sufferers upon earth, for its deliverance from its oppressors, for its true King to appear. And the song is a thanksgiving that He *has* appeared; that He *has* submitted to die with those who were under the sentence of death; that by His own blood which He has poured out for them He *has* delivered them from their bondage; *has* made them kings and priests to His Father; *has* given them a pledge and assurance that the earth shall be possessed by the meek, and not by the proud.

IX. And lest we should think of limiting Him who is in the midst of the throne by the benefits He has conferred upon the earth—by the redemption He has wrought out for the fallen and the sinful—lest this natural tendency, which has prevailed so widely in Christendom, should mar the very gratitude which seems to be the excuse for it, and should divide again

the creatures which the Lamb has united—the ear of the prophet's spirit is opened to take in another acclamation : “ *And I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders ; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands : saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* ” That which is the highest act of love—towards whatever persons it was manifested—from whatever calamities it saved them—must be the highest manifestation of the Divine character and will ; therefore must be the cause of delight to all creatures fallen or unfallen. If the Revelation is true, there can be no breach in the sympathies of any part of God's voluntary and intelligent universe. All must have one centre, one object, one inspiration, that each may perform his own tasks with freedom and joy, that each may be attaining to higher knowledge of the works of God, and of God Himself. Nor these only. Voluntary and intelligent beings are but the priests of the Creation. The whole of it must partake of the redemption ; all creation must be continually ascending from under the law of death ; there must be signs everywhere that the wings are expanding within the chrysalis ; all must be aspiring to enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Not he only who has kept weary watch o'er man's mortality, and has hoped against hope amidst the wrongs of nations and the sorrows of friends and the sins of his own heart ; but also the student of nature, who discovers a wonderful order and beauty through the universe, and yet is tortured continually by the strangest visions of death and destruction ; he also bears his part in the

thanksgiving: "*And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.*"

## LECTURE VI.

### THE SEALS OPENED.

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse : and he that sat on him had a bow ; and a crown was given unto him : and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red : and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another : and there was given unto him a great sword. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo, a black horse ; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny ; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse ; and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death the beasts of the earth. And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held : and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ? And white robes were given unto every one of them ; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake ; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood ; and

the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?—  
REV. vi.

MUCH has been said respecting these seals. There has been great diligence in commentators to fix what seal was opened in one age, what in another, what remain to be opened in our own days or in days to come. As I find no times alluded to in the prophecy, I shall speak of none, and imagine none. It seems to me that if we follow the words exactly, they will tell us more of what we want to know than if we substitute any of our own for them.

I. The Lamb has been revealed in the midst of the throne, and in the midst of the elders, and in the midst of the four living creatures. The Lamb is said to have the seven horns of power, the seven eyes of wisdom. As He opens the first seal, the prophet "*hears as it were the noise of thunder, and one of the living creatures says, Come and see.*" This Divine creature we must assume to be the Lion of the previous vision. He presents that aspect of the Divine nature which we commonly oppose to the lamblike. That is not the doctrine of the Apocalypse. He that sits on the throne is fully manifested in Him who was slain. The power of the lion is as much his as the weakness of the calf. The question to be determined is this: Is the root of power, of that power which actually does rule

the world, of that power which all shall one day confess, self-will or self-sacrifice? Does one of them or the other express the will and being of God? To that question all others are subordinate.

II. *“And I saw, and behold a white horse : and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer.”*

Another symbol is presented to us here which will be repeated often in this chapter. Man's dominion over the horse has been as much to the Arabian in the desert as to the Greek of the Ionic city, the type of his dominion over all the animals, the sign and pledge that he is himself of a higher origin. The hero is educated by the Centaur; his own characteristic title is the horse-tamer. In the book of Zechariah, to which I shall have to refer in a later part of this sermon for another purpose—which, in some respects, is more closely related to the book of the Apocalypse than any other book of the Old Testament—there is a vision of a chariot with red horses, of another with black horses, of a third with white horses, of a fourth with grisled and bay horses. These are described to him as the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses *“go forth to the north country : and the white go forth after them : and the grisled go forth toward the south country. The bay seek to go to and fro through the earth.”*

Such language belonged, I apprehend, peculiarly to the time of Zechariah, the time after Judæa had sunk into a portion of the great empire, and when it was rising again into the dignity of a nation. Zechariah had been charging his countrymen to rise and build the temple; he had been showing them how its ordi-



nances were witnesses, how Joshua, its high priest, and Zerubbabel, its lawgiver, were witnesses, that not outward might, but God's Spirit, is supreme. He had been speaking of a polity grounded on the opposite principle to this, which had its first home and its full development in the plain of Shinar. Then he passes to the vision of the horses which went forth into different lands. He could not, I conceive, any longer be content to think only of his own land as cared for by God, as watched over by Him. He felt more than ever that it had a vocation of its own; that to maintain its distinctness was the greatest of all duties, as it was the divinest of gifts. But the more he felt its pre-eminence, the more he was obliged to contemplate the other nations as having distinct callings, distinct powers, however these might be abused. They might not know the highest God, Him from whom all power came,—that was the lesson with which the Jew was to bless them. He could only do so while he saw every energy or faculty which those nations put forth—even if they made it an excuse for self-exaltation or for idolatry—as a divine energy or faculty, as a “*spirit of heaven going forth from the Lord of the whole earth.*”

When therefore the Lamb breaks the first seal, and when the Lion calls on the prophet to come and see what form then presents itself, I apprehend he gives him a light on the nature and issue of conquest, which he needed especially in his generation, and which every man has needed in his own generation. What meant those wonderful conquests of Asiatic monarchs; of the Macedonians; still more of the Romans, to whom all had bowed down? Did they prove, as they seemed to prove, that a Lion God was reigning; that power came forth from him; and that all were to be trampled under

the feet of these white horses? No! it was not so; the power itself was not destructive; not even earthly; but Divine. The Lamb was the Lord; the Lion was his servant. In time it would be shown for whom these conquests had been won; not for the Asiatic, not for the Macedonian, not for the Roman; not for self-willed arbitrary dominion at all; but for Him who was slain and who lives.

III. The Lamb opened the second seal, and there came forth another vision. "*I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*" A vision from which an optimist would turn away, but which a prophet must look steadily at, for it is the vision of facts. This red horse of tumult, of civil war, of mutual hatred, does stand forth before the eyes of men, does rise up in every time of the world's history. I need not say how wildly that horse was plunging in the days after the death of Nero, and before the establishment of Vespasian. I think, too, that there is a significance in the living creatures who called John to contemplate the vision. There is a lion-worship among men; there is a calf-worship among men. The former connects itself with the admiration of mere conquering strength; the latter connects itself with prostration, degradation, moral slavery. Each is evil because it is a divided worship. The triumphant beast is revered by the consciously strong; the feeble beast is revered by the consciously weak. The strength becomes cruelty and tyranny; the weakness becomes meanness. The Lamb will raise men out of one as well as the other. And this miserable

aspect of humanity, like that gorgeous one, is a step in the revelation of him as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

II. *“And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”*

The third beast had the face of a man. We have here not a vision of war at all, in either of its forms, either in the grand one which it takes when we think of a Nebuchadnezzar, a Timour, a Napoleon, or in the wretched one when we look upon the mere rending in pieces of countries or families in some civil commotion. The images here are all of peace. The sword is changed for the balances. Men are studious about barter and exchange. They are tender of the oil and wine. And so they think that the qualities of the beast have all been thrown aside; they are humane and civilised. But, alas! for the manhood which belongs to this anti-brutal condition of society! The animal is gone; what has taken his place? The oil and the wine are more precious than he who uses them; what the measure of wheat and barley shall cost is more than the life and heart of those who sow and reap them. It is said that St. John heard those earthly cries—those notes of merchandise—from the midst of the four living creatures. What can that mean? I think it clearly means this, brethren, that we picture to ourselves a heavenly world which is not interested in the doings of the earth, which stands altogether aloof from it; that the heavenly world which was revealed

to St. John enters into all the concerns of men, the highest and the lowest; is not indifferent to the needs of the most insignificant creature who feeds or starves below; is not indifferent about our sordid ways; but desires to raise us above the scorn of anything which is human, however low it may appear in the eyes of vulgar pride, above the reverence of anything that is inhuman, however splendid it may appear in those same eyes.

V. And as in the former cases the Lamb claimed the Lion's strength and the Calf's weakness for His own, so does He now emphatically claim for His own the face of the Man, and all that appertains to the nature which He took. The black horse and the red horse and the white horse are powers and energies from the Lord of all the earth. But can that be said of the next vision? "*And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked and behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*"

That living creature which had the wings of an eagle bids the prophet contemplate this ghastly picture. It is one which has oftentimes been contemplated on earth, with no heavenly guide to interpret it. Famine and Pestilence travelling together, and hewing down hosts of men before them; the violence of the sufferers aggravating the diseases which are preying upon them; the accompanying moral recklessness which the great Greek historian describes so wonderfully in his narration of the Athenian plague, and which has been noticed by all who have recorded such calamities since:

here, surely, we have the pale horse with Death for his rider and Hell following after. That this should be the last of the sights which the four living creatures can present; that their work is accomplished when they have led us to the mouth of this yawning abyss; might be at first an appalling consideration. But pause a little and light will dawn upon you. This is the downward course of mere animal power. Its different aspects have been shown to us; each has stood out clearly apart from the rest: it is now exhausted; it has done all that it can do. If there is no power but this animal power—ay, though there be added to it that power of calculation, of reckoning the measure of wheat which can be got for the penny, of providing for the oil and the wine, which we attribute peculiarly to man—if this be *the* power of the universe, then we *have* reached the climax of its history. Then the pale horse and its rider is the last form which we shall have to gaze upon. Death and Hell have got the victory. Let us meditate that result well; let us ask ourselves fairly, whether the mere facts of earth, supposing all glimpses of some different kind of power be shut out, are not tending to this issue.

VI. I say, brethren, another *kind* of power; for merely to contemplate *this* power as raised to omnipotence, is not to remove the confusion but to make it hopeless. Do not suppose for a moment that the Apocalypse is repeating the old story of a trial between the Giants of the earth and a Giant of Heaven, which shall prevail. Farther still be the notion from us that it is describing the struggle between a Prometheus, who would wrest some of the Divine wisdom for the use of man, and a jealous Jove, who is determined to rule men, but not to share his counsels with them. No!

understand it well. It is precisely with *this* form of omnipotence, with *this* conception of a jealous will, and with all the religious and moral horrors which are thence derived, that the Lamb is fighting. So long as mere power, whether physical power or intellectual power, is that which men covet most for themselves, so long will they attribute that same covetousness to the beings whom they worship; so long will they find themselves hemmed in by cruel conditions and provisions which restrain the might that is working restlessly and confusedly within them; so long, in the effort to break through these impediments, will they destroy the freedom which they want, and 'create the tyranny which they protest against. And so long will all the legends of the world and all the histories of the world, only echo the same cry. There is a pale horse with Death for his rider who closes every vision of good and puts out the light of every sun.

Yes, and there is a darker form behind. You think Hell is a creation of priests. Alas! priests have been shamefully guilty in preaching of Hell rather than of deliverance from Hell; so far as they have done that, so far they have violated their commission, and have been witnesses for any one rather than the Lamb who is the Conqueror of death and hell. But Hell is not the creation of priests. It haunts and torments every man. He may conceive it under one form or another; so far as he conceives it under a form at all, he takes away something of the blank and horror which surround the thought of an impenetrable solitary void, the home of a living, conscious, reflecting creature. Till a man throws off the coil of self, he cannot throw off this coil. The



more he becomes wrapped in self, the more impossible it is for him not to have this pale death vision before him, and another following it which is to swallow up himself, his kindred, the universe.

VII. But though the four living creatures have fulfilled *their* task when these four seals have been opened, there is another which the Lamb has to open, and the vision which is then disclosed is altogether unlike those that have gone before. "*And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*"

By limiting these seals to some particular period in the later history of Christendom, it has been possible to limit the description which is given here to some school or sect of Christians, who are supposed to have borne (and I doubt not did bear) a witness against the evils that prevailed around them. I dare not confine the words even to Christian martyrs of any age. I apprehend the vision which the Apostle saw was of all who anywhere in the generations before his own, or in his own, or in the later times, have believed that there is another power than self-willed tyrannical power, another power than what men worshipped in the lion, in the calf, in the human intellect, in the flying eagle—another power than that of death and hell; who, in all anguish and despair from within

and without, have held fast their faith; have cried to Him who is holy and true to show that He is mightier than those who counterfeit His Majesty, and abuse it to ends which are unholy and untrue. From these in all corners of the earth has gone up that groan, deep or loud, for deliverance; which He who sits on the throne has understood, if none else has understood it; which has been in His ears a hymn and a confession of the Lamb as the one true Lord and King of the earth. The cry came from beneath the altar. It was inspired by the Spirit of sacrifice. It was the expression of a sacrifice of body, soul, and spirit to Him who had imparted to them His own mind. The sacrifice was accomplished when the self-willed tyrants of the earth, against whom they protested, gave them to the axe or the fire, or made them drink the poison cup. But their cry did not end when they fell by the axe, or the fire, or the hemlock. Then first it became distinct and intelligible; then first it mingled in clear full harmony with all that had been ascending from those who had fallen in other lands or other times; then it was fully known by themselves that they had not been pleading for their own redemption, but for the redemption of the earth from its tormentors. And that was given them which they longed for most; the white robe of innocence; purity from all the passion and selfishness that had been mingled with their witness for God and their prayers for men. And the assurance was given that if they waited, the answer to their prayer would come.

VIII. Here is a part of the answer:—“*And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and*

*the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondsman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? "*

In this grand description most have recognised the signs of a moral and political earthquake, more terrible than any physical earthquake ever was; though it has happened, and will happen again, that physical convulsions keep time and tune with those that shake in pieces nations and fill men's hearts with dismay and anguish. Since no time is spoken of by the prophet I would not introduce any. The description may suit many periods. It may have been realised by many in the days of Alaric, and of Attila; of Zinghis Khan, or Timour; when Constantinople fell; when Napoleon laid the nations low. Do you think it must point to some more distant day still? Have you dreamt that it must refer to a destruction of the earth? We shall see whether the Apocalypse leads us to expect any such destruction at any period; whether it does not tell us of a redemption of the earth, such as the saints beneath the altar prayed for. I believe that if you study the description of *this* earthquake carefully, you will rather be led to think of a still *earlier* fulfilment of it than those to which I have alluded; a fulfilment which enables us to

understand better what they denoted. We are told here of the shaking and downfall of *heavenly* powers. What can these powers be? Are they not the demons of the old mythology? Were not those trembling, yes, and falling at the very time when St. John was at Patmos, before the preaching of a few fishermen and a tent-maker? It was not earth that was moved only, but also heaven. I do not regard the revolution of the first century as in this respect an exception in the history of revolutions, but a precedent for them. There has never been one which did not try the faith and worship of men as well as their policy and government; there never has been one which has not proved how inseparably these are connected. And I believe there never has been one which has not demonstrated the falsehood of self-will, or arbitrary will, and the truth that all power is centred in Him who gave up all power and took on Him the form of a servant.

There are many excellent men in our day who will agree with me altogether in the opinion that the Apocalypse points to the deliverance of the earth, not to its extinction. But they will say that the great men and chief captains who called the mountains to fall upon them and the hills to hide them, were flying from the wrath of the Lamb. The prophet must therefore describe a manifestation of the Lamb, a manifestation of Him as the actual Lord of the earth. Assuredly he does: there is nothing in human language more evident. And there is no lesson, it seems to me, so important—none which the Apocalypse was so much written to teach us as this: that all false and tyrannical power is a rebellion against the Lamb; that no false and tyrannical power has ever been put down except by a manifestation of the Lamb. Oh, may the Spirit

of Him who is faithful and true root and ground us in the conviction that the world never has been governed, never can be governed, by oppression and lies; that these have at no time whatever upheld its order, but have subverted its order; that whether they are throned by false religions in heavenly places, or seated by usurpation in the high places of the earth, they are cursed and doomed; that the very conquests to which they have themselves contributed—the civil tumults, mercantile frauds, plagues and famines, which they have promoted—have been their appointed punishments; that the cries of the weak and the suffering have been ultimately stronger than they; that the revolutions which have been most portentous while they lasted, from the crimes which provoked them and the crimes which were provoked by them, from the collision of human evil in its opposite forms, have been the instruments of putting down counterfeit powers, and asserting the power which is and which must abide; that all righteous men and righteous institutions have been proclaiming who was, and is, and shall be the ruler over men; that the full revelation of the Christ that is to be will be the confirmation of all the true human authority, and all the true human liberty, that ever has been; that He will prove the first to have proceeded from Him, that He will claim the last for our race as the reward of His agony and death.

## LECTURE VII.

### THE SEALING OF THE TRIBES.

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God : and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed : and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands ; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen ; Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What



are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.—REV. vii.

PART of this passage is read as the Epistle on All Saints' Day. I have spoken to you of it formerly in connection with that day. I know no verbal commentary which illustrates its meaning so well. But I shall now consider it as it bears on the general subject and purpose of the Apocalypse. The words "*After these things*" remind us of the vision we were considering last Sunday. Each of the four seals, when it was broken, had disclosed some form of *power*—of power splendid and victorious; of power preying upon itself; of power watching carefully over mere possessions and calculating for their increase; of power destroying both things and men. The breaking of the fifth seal had discovered the victims of power crying out for right; asking when it should be shown that power is the creature and minister of right. When the next seal was opened, the prophet felt the earth shaking, kingdoms falling into ruin, the great men of the earth crying to the hills and mountains to cover them from the righteous Avenger, from the wrath of Him who sat on the throne, and of the Lamb.

Yes! from the wrath of the Lamb. For He is not presented to us in the visions of the Apocalypse as interposing to arrest the decrees of righteousness, but as

executing and fulfilling them. The feeble and utterly bewildering notion—cruel as well as feeble, practically immoral as well as theoretically inconsistent, which has mixed itself with all mythologies, and has been transferred from them into Christian teachings—of a human benefactor whose mind is different from the mind of Him that sits on the throne—who seeks to avert from men the consequences of His righteous judgments—is altogether opposed to the doctrine of St. John the theologian. The Lamb is the helper of the creature, *because* He does the will of the Creator ; *because* He fights with His armour against all the usurpers who prove that they are rebels against God by trampling upon man.

Is this convulsion, then, which is making earth and heaven tremble—the thrones of the dynasts who rule in the one, the thrones of the gods whom they worship as the props of their dominion in the other—is this convulsion really the commencement—as the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains think—of a universal anarchy ? He who believed that the Lamb was opening the seals, he who had heard the cry from beneath the altar, knew that it could not be so. There *was* a universal anarchy if these kings, and great men, and chief captains, these gods on earth and in heaven, were the only supporters of order. But if they were themselves anarchs, if their disobedience to eternal laws had produced this earthquake, had made it inevitable, those laws would be asserted and brought to light by the events that caused the unfaithful rebels to turn pale and hide themselves.

I. The next revelation is of a Divine order in the midst of this disorder : *“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should*

*not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."* "How foolish!" exclaims the sciolist, who wishes to be thought a man of science; "*four angels holding four winds*; what ignorance of the laws of Nature!" Now this criticism, so far from being scientific, is merely the expression of a vulgar sensation which true science would teach us to distrust. How can it interfere with any law which governs the winds—whether we are acquainted with such a law or ignorant of it—that it should be administered by spiritual powers, living persons? If we resolutely associate the acts of such powers with caprice, if we suppose that it cannot be their special characteristic to obey and to maintain obedience, we beg the whole question. That hypothesis is precisely the opposite of the Bible hypothesis. The righteous angel in the Scriptures is precisely he who does the commandments of the perfectly righteous and orderly will, hearkening to the voice of His words. Suppose there is no such will; suppose laws to exist without a lawgiver; no doubt all subordinate agencies are incredible and impossible. And then the man asks, What rules *me*? And because he finds a will in himself which cannot bend only to laws, and must bend to something, he stoops to a tyrannical will. This is the weary circle round which those drive us who scorn the old language and have found no new language to supersede it. Glorifying laws, they lead us into the contempt and overthrow of law. Aiming at a scientific calmness, they take away from us the protection against continual restlessness.

What calmness must it have given to the mind of the Apostle, what a freedom from restlessness, what a sense of law, that, in the very midst of a revolutionary whirl, he could see the angels holding the four winds,

that nothing might be touched till a purpose affecting the destinies of man had been fulfilled ! The sea and the earth and the air are not our masters ; we are not the sport of their fancies. They are under the government of Him who has made man in His image, who has redeemed man to be His child. This is the Scriptural philosophy. What other can you find which sets man equally above the fear of the elements and all the superstitions that accompany this fear, which disposes him so bravely to investigate the laws and conditions of a world created to be his habitation, created by his Father ?

II. "*And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God : and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*"

The distinction between the angel whose function is to put a seal on the foreheads of men, and those whose function is to hurt the earth and the sea, is very significant. The latter cannot work without the former ; they are both ministerial to the punishment and education of the voluntary creature. *He* alone can receive the seal of the living God. All students of the Bible will recognise here those principles which are working themselves out in every part of its history. They will recognise also in that name, "*the living God,*" the characteristic name of the Old Testament. We read the epithet *living* as if it meant almost nothing ; it does mean the very highest and most practical truth which human language can express.

III. *What* men are to have this seal put upon them ? They are called *the servants of God*. And

when we ask further what that expression denotes, we are told that 144,000 were sealed *of all the tribes of the children of Israel*. This general announcement is not sufficient: the Apostle proceeds to enumerate the 12,000 of Judah, of Reuben, of Gad, of Aser, of Nepthalim, of Manasses, of Simeon, of Levi, of Issachar, of Zabulon, of Joseph, of Benjamin. We are naturally puzzled at the minute repetition. Why should it be necessary? Why—for this surely is the first question, that upon the answer to which the answer to the other must depend—why should *Israel* have any concern in this vision at all? We might expect that some favoured souls would be saved in the hurricane which we are told is to overtake the world. We might expect the prophet to encourage the Churches of Asia, or the Churches elsewhere, with the thought, that they or that some members of their body would be worthy to survive the day of trouble, or would be brought through it, or would have a bright reward if they were taken out of it. But Israel surely had forfeited its claim to any special indulgence. The impending calamity might stretch far beyond Jerusalem. But *there* would the shock be most violent; *that* city would be engulfed by the earthquake. Our Lord had prepared His Apostles to expect that it would. Whatever other people might suffer, the Jews were surely destined to endure horrors which they had never known—which no nation had ever known before.

IV. It may be said that, just for this reason, the faithful Jews had more need to be assured that they would be watched over. Perhaps so; but if by faithful Jews are meant those who had renounced their national privileges and thrown themselves into



the general community of the Church, why are they carefully defined by their national characteristics? Why are the tribes enumerated? Why is the same number of persons said to be selected from each? I apprehend, my brethren, that everything here points to something different from an escape which certain individuals might hope for out of an approaching tribulation, if they grasped the name of Christians and were content to part with that of Israelites. Israel, not a few picked men out of it, but the whole nation—the twelve tribes—had been called out to bear witness for a living God. The nations round about had stooped to the worship of dead gods—of gods, the Psalmist said continually, that could not see, nor speak, nor govern. To testify of One, who sees the acts and thoughts of men, who holds communion with their hearts and spirits; who is an actual King, ordering their steps, guiding their way, was the office of the family of Abraham, of the people who were brought out of Egypt, of those over whom David reigned, to whom the prophets spoke. This work, let me repeat the words again, was performed by them as a *nation*; as an organic body. Losing that organic character, they could perform their task no longer. As separate individuals they might hold a *religion*, they might maintain opinions respecting God which were different from those of other men; but they could not bear witness of One who was upholding their unity, who was not suffering them to be lost in the surrounding world. Accordingly, as I have often observed to you, the holy men and prophets of the Jews, even when they were most persecuted by their countrymen, even when they had the bitterest grounds for complaint against them, never pretended that they



had some individual virtue of their own as witnesses for God. They simply asserted the position of Israelites; they rebuked their fellows for renouncing that position; their horror of all horrors was the possibility that the nation, through the indifference of its members, might be cut off; their belief and hope was that into whatever temporary or apparent abeyance it might sink, its life was immortal; that the living God would Himself sustain it. Through all disasters, through all captivities, in the darkest hours, that faith went with them, that faith enabled them to bear right onward.

I cannot persuade myself that the mind of St. John was less pervaded and penetrated by this truth than the mind of Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel had been; or that anything had happened which could make him acquiesce more contentedly than they had acquiesced in the prospect that the nation was to be a nation no longer. And yet everything seemed to say that this awful doom was approaching. It appeared inevitable that the nation should lose, not merely its independence—that had gone already—but its very substance, all that had marked it out as a body called by God to do a special service for men.

V. Perhaps you will admit that this was a tremendous problem for a Jew to encounter in the first century. But I wish you could see what a tremendous problem it is for the students of history in this century. What do we mean by the records of the Old World? Not, surely, the fragmentary notices we can gather of Babylonian monarchies, the names and dates of Egyptian dynasties, however interesting these may be. We mean the records of two or three distinct nations; of Judæa; of Greece; of Rome. All that is vital in the

ancient world is gathered up in the story and the destiny of those nations. Our fathers knew it to be so; with all our added wisdom, we know it also. Well; but Greece as a nation had sunk already; Rome as a nation had perished in the empire; Jerusalem was the last relic of national existence left in the wide universe. It was but a relic; a token of what had been. Still it was that; while it remained, there was a sign that all was not imperial.

If this be so, we may not be really less interested—we may be more deeply interested—than St. John himself was, in that heavenly vision which declared to him that the nation, though already shorn of most of its locks,—though the last might be cut off, and it might be destined even for ages to work in the mill in blindness and solitude—had still an imperishable life; that those of the nation who confessed to a living God, who believed that He had actually manifested Himself in His Son, represented its perpetuity; that coming out of the different tribes they were witnesses of the organic permanence of these tribes. Their brethren who adhered to different sects and schools, who called themselves Pharisees or Sadducees, might form a numerical majority. But they refused to own the King of the nation. To all intents and purposes they refused to *be* a nation. They would become what they had practically declared themselves to be, a set of units with no principle of cohesion,—solemn witnesses in their disorganisation to other lands that only a living God can bind men into one; but very feeble witnesses that a nation once born is never lost, that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. *Such* a testimony could be fully borne by those who clung to the faith that the Son of David was indeed

the Son of God; that the kingdom of David never would cease while that Son lived and reigned.

VI. In this way I believe the vision of the exile in Patmos endorses the hopes which earnest men, either Jews or Christians, have entertained of the ultimate restoration of Israelites to more than all the privileges their fathers enjoyed, and confutes the opinion of those who say that they are not to be different from other people, but, if they confess Christ, must be lost in our Christendom. I find it most satisfactory to take the language of the prophets, even in a more strict sense than these teachers do, and to believe that they were not deceived when they said that the hills were less fixed and everlasting than their Divine polity. But if we read them so far literally, we must go further. I hinted last week that the prophets generally, and those after the return from captivity especially, could not help regarding every nation as having a function and gifts and a destiny of its own. That which was distinct was evidently intended by the living God to be distinct; that which had done a great work was marked out by God for that work. Therefore if the Jewish nation has had a permanence in the mind of Him who was, and is, and is to come; if those of the race—wheresoever and whosoever they have been—who have believed in a living God, have asserted this permanence: we may also hold that in His eye there has been a permanence in the nation of Greece through all ages of its humiliation under Christian or Mahometan oppressors; a permanence in the Italian nation amid all its subjection to Papal or Germanic tyrants; a permanence to be one day fully asserted and realised by each. And if we venture to ask, in the case of either of these, or of the Jewish nation, why that full assertion of its

vitality has not come sooner, why what *has* come in each case has been as yet so imperfect; the vision of which we are speaking gives the reply,—it is one which we have as much need to lay to heart as any people anywhere.

Look at the history of all great national struggles—among people the most opposite to each other in habits, in race, in character, in religious profession. Look at the Swiss in the fourteenth century, at the Dutch in the sixteenth, at the Tyrolese in our own; see whether the seal of a living God has not been legibly marked upon them; see whether the awakening to conscious national life has not been connected with a faith in One who cared that men should be alive and should be free; who was not a distant Being to be sought after and propitiated; who was Himself seeking after His servants; kindling the dying embers in them; stirring them to repentance, stirring them to hope. Consider earnestly whether the belief in men that they form a nation which lives on from age to age, which is affected by the sins of its fathers and by the righteous acts of its fathers, which has an inheritance that is worth striving for and dying for, does not imply the belief in a living God, and can ever be long separated from the direct confession of a living God. On the other hand, consider whether a people, be their religious profession ever so great, be their talk about the permanence of the individual soul ever so loud, really does or can worship a living God, while it looks upon itself nationally as only a great machine for producing goods and a mart for exchanging them, or only as a collection of sects and parties. To talk of *nationalities*, as newspaper-writers or politicians talk of them, is easy; to *be* a nation—to feel that the name is a reality and not a fiction, this is

hard ; he who would cultivate that feeling must win it through endurance and sacrifice, must learn to measure what is substantial against what is accidental ; must discover the impotence of many fine philosophical theories. We take this glorious privilege by tradition from those who bled for it ; if we lose it, we lose all our power over those we govern, our honesty towards each other. We may lose it ; other lands, of which we have spoken scornfully, may earn it as our fathers earned it. If such a calamity should be in store for us, such a blessing for them, it will be because they have become less of atheists than we are, because they are discovering beneath all their superstitions that there is a living God who is working for them, in whom they may trust ; whom *our* superstitions are hiding from us.

Another vision followed that of the sealing of the tribes.

VII. *"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands ; and cried with a loud voice, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."*

The order of these revelations is, I believe, the order of the Divine history, and the order in which its truths present themselves to our consciences. The Apostle is thoroughly imbued with the sacredness of the nation ; he is assured that it is enduring, that it has the seal of the living God. So he can ascend to the perception of this society, which is gathered from all kindreds, nations, and tongues. So he can contemplate an universality and an unity which are exactly the opposites of the imperial universality and unity. So he can perceive that the family of God is not divided



by place and time, or by the Fall or by death. This Church is not of the past or of the present or of the future, but is like Him who has gathered it, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. No earthly associations are wanting to it ; it is circumscribed by none. Angels mix with these citizens of different nations and tribes ; their bond is a common worship.

VIII. *“And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen : Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”*

These words express satisfaction in the perfectly good will of God ; rejoicing that that goodness is united with perfect wisdom ; gratitude that to goodness and wisdom appertains perfect power. This is the thought that gives the angels strength ; this is the inspiration to their work. And then follows that memorable passage :

IX. *“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes ? and whence came they ? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”*

We complain that even these words have become so



familiar to us that they have lost much of their power. No! my friends; it is not familiarity which deprives them of their power. They are not familiar enough; the picture has been too much a mere fancy one in our eyes. We have thought of it as belonging to some distant region, altogether separated from this earth. Let us rise to it as St. John rose to it. Let us think first of our own nation, sealed and set apart by the living God as a witness for Him. Let us think of the brave and true men who in other days have borne that witness, who have not counted their lives dear to them, that we might know Him better, and that their land might be a witness of Him, and might be a better inheritance for their sons. Let us think of those whom we have seen battling and suffering in the midst of us, fainting, yet victorious: caring, above all things, that they might shew forth the name of Him who is love, and might bear His likeness. Let us remember the old men who have uttered to us wise counsels and prophesyings, the young men who have accomplished so little of what they dreamed, the children who have left memories behind them of what they might have become. Then think, as the nation is immortal, so must those who have lived in it be immortal. These old men, these young men, these children, must know us better than they did on earth because they know God better; must help us better, because they are more fulfilling His commands. Then their number will expand continually; those of other lands whom we have read of and heard of will be mingled with them. We shall lose all reckoning of their multitude, yet no one Church, or nation, or person will be lost in it. Each will shine forth, all will shine forth in the light of His tender love, who gave His only-begotten Son to take

our flesh upon Him, and to die. Above all, beneath all, for all, will rise the Good Friday prayer : \*

*“ We beseech thee, Almighty God, graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.”*

\* Preached on the Sunday before Easter.

## LECTURE VIII.

### THE SEVEN TRUMPETS.

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!—REV. viii.

THERE was an earthquake when the last seal was

broken. Then self-willed power having passed through its different stages, and having exhausted itself, was reaching its natural consummation. There would be a judgment. It might end and a new circle begin. But a doom is now awaiting not the world's city, but God's city ; that which has been set as a witness to the world *against* its idolatries, *for* the dominion of the righteous King. Such a downfall, comparatively insignificant in the eyes of the rulers of the earth though not quite so insignificant to them, is nothing less to the prophet than the end of an age or dispensation. It is the greatest catastrophe that has yet befallen the universe. There is silence in Heaven in the contemplation of it.

I. *"And I saw the seven angels that stood before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."*

In no part of the Apocalypse are the allusions to the Old Testament so numerous as here. You must turn to the sixth chapter of Joshua for the meaning of these trumpets : *"Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel ; none went out, and none came in. And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thy hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns. And the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout. And the walls of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him."*

The story preserved in that sacred book which told

of the conquest of Canaan by the little band of slaves that had come out of Egypt must have fixed itself strongly in the imagination of every Jewish child. A strange sense of invisible, mysterious power, which could overcome the strength of walls and the force of armed men, will have been mixed with a feeling that their fathers were a set of righteous men, favourites of Heaven, who punished the wicked and accursed people of Canaan. The rabbinical education will have done little to distinguish what was right from what was wrong in these early impressions. It will have confirmed the wonder at the events that happened in the old time into a superstition; the exultation in the glories of the one nation into pride and contempt of other nations. The Jew escaping from that education; conversing and trading with foreigners; discovering that he was inferior in outward position to them, and not better than they in inward character; suspecting that the like was true of those whom Joshua led; acquiring a respect for ordinary discipline, material strength, the resources of an empire; learning that the heathen claimed more miraculous interpositions on behalf of their ancestors than had ever been claimed for his; would be likely to distrust in his heart, if he did not scorn with his lips, the lessons which he had inherited. In that unbelief, or in a violent effort to suppress it and to crush those who gave any signs of it, a majority of Jews were probably living in the days of St. John. There were those before and since who were more truly little children than they had ever been, and that because they had put away the mere childish things of the fancy, and risen to the thought and reflection of men. They had found in the account of the fall of Jericho

the witness of a God who was not more the God of their fathers than of them; who in different methods, suited to different periods, was always asserting the subjection of material power to spiritual; who was always dooming cities to perish that stood upon a false foundation, be their apparent strength what it might; who had chosen a poor Syrian tribe, not (so their old lawgiver and prophet continually assured them) for their righteousness, but as witnesses of His righteousness; to put down races which were setting laws at defiance and polluting the earth with their crimes. Surely, if it were so, He would not treat that tribe upon any different maxims from those which He had applied to the tribes of Canaan.

There were such Israelites. St. John was one of them. And no one knew better than he did what worshippers of material force, what disbelievers in spiritual might, his countrymen had grown to be. Though living away from the holy city, he was aware that it had become an accursed city, given over to strife and hatred, probably to as much fleshly wickedness as had brought down the judgment on the Canaanites, certainly to a spiritual wickedness which they had not known. Yet he needed a special revelation to convince him that the same sentence which had been executed on Jericho was to be executed on Jerusalem; that the trumpets were sounding around *her*; and that they were blown not by mortal priests, but by the angels which stood before God.

I take this to be the simple interpretation of this vision; that which connects it most naturally with the one immediately preceding and with the one which follows. Holding that opinion, I cannot assent to any of the more ingenious explanations of the trumpets



which transfer them to a later period, or to a series of periods, even if I thought they could be thus applied more directly to Christian uses. But I have no such thought. Let us hear what these trumpets said to the Israelites; then we shall listen with purged and open ears to the sound of any that may be uttering their warnings to us.

II. "*And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it on the earth; and there were voices, and thunderings and lightnings, and an earthquake.*"

If the former words recall the ministry of the priests before Jericho, these recall the ministry of the priests in the tabernacle. That ministry transferred to the temple had been an abiding one. Jews did not merely read of it in a book, they saw it with their eyes. The altar and the sacrifice, and the incense and the daily prayers, associated themselves with the earliest thoughts of those who dwelt at Jerusalem; were probably more impressive still to those who only visited it at the solemn festivals. These too, like the historical record, must have had a twofold effect on the frequent or the occasional beholder. The acts of worship spoke of a communion between the visible and the unseen world. God was meeting men at the mercy-seat. The priest was the continual witness of the communion. But it was the worship of *Jews*. God had spoken to *their* forefathers.

They had been told what He was, and how they ought to approach Him. Amazing gift! What nation had ever such a gift bestowed upon it! The growing boy was taught formally what the child had learnt with its heart. The awe of the service was changed for him into a kind of terror; that which he wanted in sympathy was supplied by appeals to his awakening pride. "The heathen know nothing of the right way of serving God; *their* priests are altogether wrong in the sacrifices which they offer. Their sacrifices will never be accepted." Then must have come, in ten thousand instances, the revulsion of the mature Israelite against this indoctrination, or a cold inward indifference to it. "Why is one sacrifice better than another? Why may not their priests be as wise as ours? Why may not both be deceivers equally? How do we know that any intercourse with beings above ourselves is possible? How can we tell that they are the least affected by our propitiations? How can we tell that there are such beings at all?" And here also there was a passage through the struggles of manhood back to a truly infantine faith. "My prayers are not only worthless; they are often impossible. I cannot pray. But I want to pray. An irresistible impulse draws me to make the attempt. My sacrifices; what are they? Worse than beggarly. They seem wicked. I have no right to offer them. My mind is wrong, and I am trying to make God's mind bend to it. And yet ought I not to make sacrifices? Ought I not to *be* a sacrifice? What if God is Himself moving me to pray, not against His will, but that His will may be done? What if He is stirring me to offer sacrifice, not that I may get something by it, but that I may be delivered from the greatest of all burdens—the burden of my selfishness? What if

sacrifice is a surrender? What if He and not I is at last the author of the surrender? What if this was the meaning of my country's worship? What if this was the reason why He ordained the sacrifice, why He made the atonement; why we can only come with our dead offering, confessing our sins? What if the knowledge of this truth is the great blessing of the children of Abraham, that with which we are to bless all the families of the earth?"

Those who had been led so far by an invisible teacher were ready for the revelation, mighty as it was, of the sacrifice of the Lord of man and the Son of God; the revelation of Him as saying, "*Lo, I come,*" not to alter thy will, but "*to do thy will, O God.*" But another revelation awaited them as the consequence of this: the revelation of a Judge. The prayers and sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem had not been in vain. No incense that had ascended to heaven from any human heart had been in vain. The High Priest within the veil had presented every cry and groan to His Father. For what had these cries and groans been? That God would *not* judge the earth? That He would leave it to welter on in its crime and wretchedness? Such prayers may have been offered by those who knelt at Jewish or heathen altars. They were prayers for stones and not bread. They were the drink-offerings of blood—of bloody men—of which the High Priest says, "*I will not offer them.*" The prayers for right and justice did not avert thunders and lightnings, and an earthquake; thunders and earthquake now answered them.

When we read our Lord's conversation with His disciples respecting the latter days, we are often tempted to strain the words from their obvious sense, and to say that they could not refer to a judgment upon

*that age and that city*, though He says so solemnly that they did. Our disposition to trifle even with that Divine language is not without an excuse. If we assume that Jerusalem had no relation with the rest of mankind—with the nations from which it had been separated, as well as with the nations which should be born when it had passed away—we cannot understand how words of such general import, pointing to distress and perplexity everywhere, should be accomplished by the downfall of a capital that had no longer any of its ancient glory, that was merely the dwelling-place of fierce rebel factions. But if that city had been the Divine centre of the old world; if *there* had been the witness of that Name, and that Kingdom, and that Will, by which the world had been governed, *there* too must be the key to its destinies. The meaning of the earthquake is not understood—its relation to the past and future is incomprehensible—till we know what it portended to the city in which David had reigned, and the Son of David had been crucified.

III. "*And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*"

Everything indicates the greatness and importance of their function. It is not a city of the Canaanites which is to fall flat; it is the city which testified that the gods of the Canaanites were not the gods that ruled the earth; which testified of a King of righteousness and peace.

IV. "*The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth; and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*"

The book of Joshua supplied us with hints respecting the purpose of the trumpets; the book of Leviticus

explained that part of the vision which had reference to the sacrifices and incense.

Here we are carried back to the plagues of Egypt, of which we were reading before Easter. This passage in Exodus occurs at once to the reader of the Apocalypse :

*“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch forth thine hands towards heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt, upon man, and upon beast, and upon every herb of the field throughout the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, upon all the land of Egypt. . . . And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast, and the hail smote every beast of the field, and brake every tree of the field.”*

This language, like that we have considered before, had been turned to a fatal use by the self-conceit of the Jew. Pharaoh and the magicians had been humbled, for the sake of *his* fathers. *Their* lawgiver was able to do rarer miracles than those who were called the wise men of Egypt had done. The laws of nature had been suspended, that *their* race might be delivered. The passage before us afforded food for this self-complacency. Egypt had suffered by the hail and fire ; Goshen had been exempt. And thus the great lesson which these plagues were bearing to the world was wholly missed. Not the I AM, the Eternal Lawgiver who had revealed Himself to His servant Moses, was speaking and acting in them ; but a capricious being, like in all essentials to those gods which the magicians honoured. Moses had not claimed the powers of nature by which they were enslaved as the ministers of a God who was mightier than the tyrant ; who cared to deliver the outcast. He had not taught

the Egyptians, of *whose* government such plagues testified when they occurred at other times. All was turned into a mere trial of strength between a Jewish prophet and the Egyptian magi; laws were set at naught by both equally. Now comes the restoration of the old record to its true force. The trumpet of the angel proclaims that the plague of hail and fire is a message to Goshen more than to Egypt. Jerusalem is to hear in that trumpet a sure declaration, that the just Judge and the Saviour is judging Israel, that the world may be saved.

V. *“And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea : and the third part of the sea became blood ; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died, and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”*

The first trumpet, if we take the simplest sense of the symbols, indicated a withering of the produce of the earth, a decay of vegetation such as might be caused by some sudden calamity, the result and punishment of neglect and heartlessness. The passage I have just read, whatever force we may give to special clauses in it, points as distinctly to disasters that affect the sea and the commerce of nations. *The third part of the ships were destroyed.* That specific form of suffering might impoverish great emporiums, like Alexandria or Ephesus; only in its secondary consequences would it reach the Palestine of the first century. But the trumpets of the angels, like the words of our Lord, teach the Israelite to associate the doom of his country with the common woes of mankind. That city was set upon a hill to be a testimony to the world of a God who rules earth and sea; who



has appointed men to subdue the earth and to traverse the sea; who cares for those whom He has made in His image, more than for all the treasures which they dig out of the ground or barter in their traffic. The message had not been borne; the Jew had as much worshipped these treasures, had as little cared for man, had as little believed in a just God, as the heathen round about him. Therefore earth and sea lifted up their voices against him more than against all others; they said to him, not to Pharaoh or Belshazzar, "Thy kingdom has been taken from thee; thou hast been weighed in the balance, and found wanting."

VI. "*And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood, and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters because they were made bitter.*"

That we have here the hint of some visitation which affects the internal life and health of nations as that we spoke of last affected their intercourse with each other, most, I think, will agree. I do not know that we should gain much if we could interpret the special points of the description more exactly. The wormwood which makes waters bitter, and destroys life, would be an apt and no exaggerated symbol for miseries that have befallen countries in the East and the West, at various times; that such would have been felt among the other woes that were afflicting the world in the disastrous years preceding the fall of Jerusalem, we may well believe, if we had no testimonies to the fact. What concerns us is, that the calamity was a message to the Jew. It told him that

he was the Jonah in the vessel. It was another blast of the trumpet which declared that the walls of *his* city were to fall flat.

VII. "*And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.*"

It would be easy to take this as a description of a moral and not a physical darkness. But I believe we shall be departing from the general purpose of these revelations, and violating the consistency of them, if we adopt that interpretation.

The sounds of these first four trumpets all point, it seems to me, to the connexion of physical life and physical decay with moral life and moral decay; to the way in which physical agents become the instruments of punishing moral transgression; to the truth that earth, and sea, and rivers, and sun, and moon, and stars obey eternal laws; but that they are laws given them by Him who has created voluntary beings, and whose highest kingdom is over them. These were the truths which the Jewish nation had been called, out of all nations, to declare by its words, its services, its continual life. These are the truths which it was to declare by its ruin and death.

But if I say this, it is not because I doubt that there are evils far more portentous than any which earth, or sea, or air, or sun and moon can inflict, or that these were at work when Jerusalem fell, and were causing her fall. Such darker evils, I believe, are pointed at in the words which follow.

VIII. "*And I beheld and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice,*

*Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpets which are yet to sound."*

That *these* trumpets point to moral sins, to spiritual wickedness, and to their political consequences, I cannot doubt. The inhabitants of the earth had need to know that such woes are the greatest of all woes. The heathen had as much need to know it as those to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the promises, of whom as pertaining to the flesh Christ came, who is over all God-blessed for ever. If any can need it more than they, it is those who have inherited a better Covenant, a fulfilled law, a higher promise—the members of Christ's body, the inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. May He who caused the deaf to hear enable His Church to take in His message! May He who caused the dumb to speak enable His ministers to deliver it!

## LECTURE IX.

### THE LATTER PLAGUES.

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth : and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit ; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace ; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth : and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree ; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months ; and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it ; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle ; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron ; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails : and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. One woe is past : and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels

which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand : and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone : and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions ; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails : for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood : which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk : neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.—REV. ix.

A VOICE from Heaven told St. John that the woes which would follow the blasts of the three last trumpets would be far more terrible than those which preceded them. This language, I thought, intimated that they would be of a different kind ; that there would be in them more of moral and spiritual, less of merely physical misery. Let us see whether the description which is given of the first of these woes confirms this opinion.

I. "*And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth.*" I do not say that these words are decisive as to the nature of the approaching calamity. Taken alone they *might* denote some mischief which was to affect the earth, as such, like the one we heard of when the first trumpet blew. But I think we should feel the symbol to be far less violent, far more like those to which we are accustomed in prophetic and even in ordinary discourse, if it denoted the fall of

some intellectual power, the awful change which takes place when that which should be a source of light to the world increases its darkness.

II. The words that follow, "*and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit,*" could mean nothing, I conceive, if some physical disorder was indicated by the star falling from Heaven. But supposing some man, or some society of men that had believed in a righteous and true God of Heaven, that had testified of Him, should become believers in another kind of God altogether—should practically acknowledge an evil God—would not such a description be verified? A yawning gulph of Atheism is discovered beneath a surface which had been covered with a religious crust, upon which fair fruit seemed to be growing. Men begin to ask themselves whether there is any foundation for the universe at all, whether it is not built on rottenness. That this pit was opening beneath the *heathenism* of the Roman empire in the first century most will acknowledge. But had the heathenism the *key* of the pit? Was the bottomless infinite laid bare when Jove began to be regarded as a synonym of the air, even when the whole Pantheon was thought of as a collection of malignant demons? No! to the eye of an apostle the worshippers of Jehovah presented a far more horrible spectacle; their unbelief in the God of their fathers, their substitution of a dark power for Him was not only the interpretation, but in some sense was the cause, of the change in heathenism. For its own cause we must look further. It is set forth, I think, in the tremendous words, "*If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin. But now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*" The Revelation of Christ to them as the brightness of the



Father's glory had brought that which was hidden within them into full consciousness. They had been dwelling in a twilight. The light was still struggling in them. But they saw the Perfect Image and fled from it. That was not their God. That which was directly contrary to this image was their God. The witnesses for the deliverer became the witnesses and instruments of the destroyer. The star had indeed fallen from heaven. And because it was a star set for the illumination of the world, the whole world must suffer from its fall. The broken imperfect faiths of men, those that still vibrated between Ahriman and Ormuzd, that still timidly confessed, amidst all monstrous contradictions and foul acts, that good was Divine and must prevail—all gather blackness from this great apostasy. This bottomless pit is opened; only thus could it be opened.

III. "*And there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.*" There is a medium of mist through which we may behold heaven. Through that mist it may look to us sometimes like a magnified earth; sometimes as if it were the faint shadow of that which here is substantial. *This* medium is not one of mist, but of smoke. A furnace is beneath. Nothing is seen above but wrath and horror. And all nature takes the same likeness. All forms that once appeared beautiful become hideous. "*The sun and the air are darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.*"

IV. "*And there came out of the pit locusts upon the earth, and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men*

*which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months : and their torment is as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man."*

Nearly the most vivid description in ancient poetry is that which the prophet Joel gives of the army of locusts which invaded Palestine in his day. Travellers have testified to its literal fidelity ; a statistical table or an agricultural report might state the facts of such a calamity more drily, but not so accurately. That description illustrates better than any other the mistake which we commit when we talk of making allowance for the figurative language of the prophets. We need make no allowances for it. We should study it and interpret it carefully and strictly, and then it will give us a living instead of a dead picture of events that have actually occurred ; it will bring before us an actual past, which may be compared with an actual present.

I refer to that passage in the oldest of all the prophets because none enables us better to settle what must be the signification of this passage in the Revelation. "*A nation,*" says Joel, "*is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree : he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away ; the branches thereof are made white.*" Again, "*The field is wasted, the land mourneth ; for the corn is wasted : the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen ; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley ; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth ; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also,*

*and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered : because joy is withered away from the sons of men."* So, again, in the second chapter, "*The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them as a desolate wilderness ; yea, and nothing shall escape them.*"

There can be no mistake about the import of this language : its whole force is lost if it is supposed to point at anything else than such a destruction of grass, trees, produce, as a flight of insects, and only of insects, could cause. Now observe with what care the Apostle, evidently having the discourse of Joel in his mind, excludes those very subjects upon which he dwells. *These locusts were "Not to hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree."* I need hardly stop to observe that such expressions, if they mean anything, must just as much prevent us from supposing that the locusts figuratively represent the irruption of some human host. Imagine a horde of Huns or Avars leaving no traces of their march on the earth or on any tree ! Imagine it being said of such locusts, that it was given to them that they should torment but not kill their victims ! Surely it is our own fault if we will not profit by these hints ; if we suppose that a prophet, because he has a Divine commission to enlighten us respecting great truths, is more heedless in the use of his symbols, is less able to make us understand them, than an ordinary teacher.

The Locusts, then, I apprehend, which rose out of the smoke of the pit, which were only to touch those men who had not the seal of God on their foreheads, and were to smite them as a scorpion smiteth a man, must point to those superstitions, especially those rest-

less speculations respecting the coming future, which beset men from whom all belief in the Divine goodness has departed; who feel that the world is governed by an enemy instead of a Father; whose accusing consciences make the worst anticipations of that which is designed for them credible. How these locusts darken sky and air; how they breed hateful suspicions, which disturb the intercourse of man and man; how they connect themselves with each man's recollections of what he has done, and of what he is; how they tell him one moment that what he is now he shall always be; how then they urge him to try whether he cannot get quit of his own being, of his immortal self; we may all know. Oh, my friends, these torments are indeed the torments of a scorpion when he striketh a man; no other similitude can be equally true with that.

V. It is to anguish of this kind that the words apply so strictly, so mournfully, "*And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.*" A perpetual craving for death, as the end of these scorpion stings: a perpetual horror of death, as if the sting were in it; as if that sting could not be taken out. The repose of death is delicious; the man would give worlds for it. "Not to be!" But alas! does not that mean "never to have been"? Is there any other condition on which this kind of repose is possible? The conscience answers, "No! The grave must be deep enough and wide enough to inclose all that has been as well as all that is to be, or it is not deep and wide enough for me."

VI. The presence of this scorpion torment is the great characteristic sign of all those superstitions that

arise out of the bottomless pit of unbelief. But they have other characteristics which seem less compatible with each other. The first is this: "*Their shapes were like unto horses prepared for the battle.*" There is hurry, eagerness, terror about them. They *seem* always getting ready for some encounter. But they never *are* ready. Fear where no fear is; absence of fear for the real crisis that is approaching; incapacity for taking any clear, steady measure of danger; here is a token of the tribulation of that day as it has been of the like in all subsequent days. This is the second mark: "*And they had on their heads as it were crowns of gold.*" Fantastic expectations of possible felicity alternate with terror. Crowns of gold float before the eyes of the dupe; the trader in auguries and enchantments ever and anon holds them forth. A sensual paradise, with no tree of knowledge, or one that may be eaten of, seems about to be restored. This is the third sign: "*And their faces were like the faces of men.*" The different superstitions and dreams derive their different aspects from the tastes, tempers, partialities, antipathies of particular teachers; they all reflect the faces of men; none have any permanent or Divine substance. Here is the fourth feature: "*And they had hair as the hair of women.*" A feminine element was in them; not merely an element of weakness and timidity, though this was present, no doubt. We have seen already what part the false prophetess was playing in the Church of Thyatira; in the forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, when such men as Simon and Elymas were scattered so widely over the earth, the Jezebel was at least as often found as the Balaam; one stood continually beside the other. And the dreams of the future as well as the immediate



fantasies exhibited the qualities of both. Again, "*The teeth of these locusts were like the teeth of lions.*" In the bold language of Joel these teeth had been attributed to actual insects; he is comparing objects, not by their size, but by their effects. The prophet of the Apocalypse does the same. Those superstitions which have issued from the bottomless pit, whatever soft airs they may put on, let them be as human, as feminine as they will, are still murderous; they are tearing in pieces whatever is left of righteousness and truth on the earth.

Again. "*They have breast-plates as it were breast-plates of iron.*" By what breast-plates of iron the cruel superstitions, the dark worships of the world are protected, most missionaries could proclaim. They have learnt, I trust, that fearful truth, not only by their experience of heathens, but of themselves; they have found what an unnatural and tremendous hardness any falsehood to which we have yielded, and which has girt itself about us, may acquire. That these locusts then, in St. John's vision—these which had spread themselves over the earth in the latter days of Jerusalem, and were darkening earth and air,—should have this among other signs of their nature, can cause us no wonder. But again, "*The sound of their wings was as the sound of many chariots running to battle.*" The Divine seer, like the false prophets, was looking for a battle. And all those various forms of evil in which were gathering up the falsehoods and false worships that had been diffused over the world up to that hour, were in his ears as the sound of chariots hastening to the battle; as the forerunners and foretellers of a conflict between the powers of good and evil such as there had never been yet. But whatever other marks



distinguish these locusts, that which was noticed first must be kept in mind to the end. "*They had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails.*" There may be crowns of gold on their heads; but that from which they derive all their power is from the torments they are able to cause the conscience. That which doth make cowards of us all, makes these thoughts of the future terrific and real; without that they would be merely lies, proceeding from the father of lies.

VII. For "*they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name is in the Hebrew tongue Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.*" Here we have come to the root of the matter. Devil worship, the worship of the destroyer, is the source of all the foul and hurtful fancies that people the hearts of men. These men have bowed down to him; they have confessed him to be their lord and master. Hitherto there has been a protest against his tyranny. Wherever there is a nation, wherever there is law, justice, freedom,—even the struggle for law, justice, freedom,—there is he defied; thence goes forth a proclamation: This is not our Lord; we owe him no allegiance. In one nation that protest had been distinct, formal, perpetuated from age to age. In one nation the voice, "*I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the house of bondage—I am the Lord God, merciful and gracious—I am the Righteous Judge of the earth,*" had been heard through every law and every sacrifice. And now that nation reverences Abaddon or Apollyon under the name of Jehovah. Was not this a woe which was prophetic of woes to come? Was not this a trumpet announcing that the holy city was to fall down?

VIII. "*One woe is past ; and, behold, there come two more woes hereafter. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.*"

Does not this vision resemble that of the first four trumpets, rather than the one we have just been considering? There is an actual river introduced, the Euphrates. A third part of men are said to be killed. Two hundred thousand thousand horsemen are seen forming a great army. Are we not to look for some physical, rather than some moral calamity, as indicated by the language? I have no doubt that this is the first impression of most readers. I think it can scarcely be the ultimate one.

We shall perceive, I think, that this trumpet succeeds the fifth in natural chronological sequence. The bottomless pit is opened; the swarms of dark superstitions are spread abroad; then comes the removal of a spiritual chain which had hitherto held an evil host in check. But the river Euphrates? At all events, upon any scheme of interpretation, that river must be symbolical; it will not point to events visibly transacted on its banks, or in its neighbourhood. The question therefore is, what does such a symbol most obviously and naturally signify? A Jew would always think of the Euphrates in connexion with Babylon; he would regard it as the river of the Asiatic monarch. He would regard it as spiritually indicating the separation between the two great

kingdoms, the Babel kingdom, and the Israelitish kingdom; the kingdom which stood on the ground of self-will; the kingdom which stood on the ground of the God of Righteousness. He would therefore regard the command to loose the angels who are bound on that river Euphrates as the Divine decree that the barriers between these kingdoms, so far as the latter was represented in Jerusalem, should exist no longer. The moral basis of the distinction had been destroyed. Jerusalem was a part of the Babel society: may we not say boldly, had become the centre and capital of it?

IX. The year, the day, the hour when this crisis took place, we are told, was fixed. The long pent up evil broke forth. But it had gained no omnipotence. A higher Will determined when it would have been a lie for Jerusalem any longer to pretend that it was a witness for God, when it was right that it should be proclaimed the great witness for the Devil. That year, and day, and hour were not indifferent to the rest of the world. They affected it in ways that it knew not. How, ultimately, we are to be instructed hereafter. How, immediately, we learn from the present passage. I do not find in it any announcement which leads me to doubt that the interpretation of the Euphrates which I have given is the right one. The number of the horses is clearly one that would not have been adopted in any narrative of an actual transaction. It is deliberately chosen to indicate a host which never could have been gathered together on any earthly field; yet which is to carry a wide-spread mysterious desolation. The description of the horses and horsemen is of the same character. The "*breastplates of fire and of jacinth, and of fire and of brimstone,*" point to no armour that was

wrought in earthly forges; the "*fire, and smoke, and brimstone*" do not come out of the mouths of animals that man can tame.

X. I do not, however, in the least mean to explain away the assertion that "*men were killed by the fire, and the smoke, and the brimstone that issued out of their mouths.*" I do not understand by this death, spiritual death. Wars and fighting came then, as they come now, from the lusts in men's members; the brutality, covetousness, self-glorification, atheism of a land, were then, as they are now, the causes of destruction to hundreds of thousands. The loosing of the angels might be the removal of restraints from powers of moral evil. But if it was that, it was inevitably the removal of hindrances to the murder of men's bodies. The passage of the Euphrates might be the transgression of the boundary between a kingdom of righteousness and a kingdom of mere power. But when that boundary is taken away, there is no safety for any earthly thing from the violence of power. That singular description in the 19th verse, of the power of these horses—"It is in their mouth and in their tails, for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt"—imports, I apprehend, a thorough union of intellectual with animal force, from which all moral purpose is excluded. There is the mouth which can utter wisdom; there is the tail which strikes and slays. All the wisdom is serpentine: *the tail has heads*; these obey the lower instincts; to do hurt is their one function. Surely when such creatures are left for a little space to range at large, they will fulfil that function. Woe to the world because of them. Exalted to high places, *nothing will be restrained which they have imagined to do.*

XI. Six trumpets then have sounded. We ask, what effect did they produce on those who were living under the sound of them? How did they influence the heathen world? How did they influence the Jewish world? The seer makes answer: "*And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornications, nor of their thefts.*" So it was in the beginning, so it will be to the end. All outward plagues, all outbursts of moral evils, all apostasies in Divine Societies, were and are trumpets of God; those who acknowledge His goodness and truth will tremble and rejoice that He is speaking to them; that He is calling them to repent; that He is preparing the way for a manifestation of Himself. But these trumpets, let them sound as loud and long as they may, seldom stir a man who disbelieves in a living and good God to confess Him. The terror which is in them stupefies rather than quickens. The slumberer is half roused out of his dream; is bewildered; takes a fresh opiate; flies to the gods that neither see, nor hear, nor walk; flies from Him whom he has only recognised in thunderings and lightnings. The sentence is everlastingly true that not the fire, nor the earthquake, nor the blast rending the mountains, but only the still small voice reaches the heart, and compels it to bow. The Jew and the Heathen alike hear the notes of approaching doom, and are unmoved. Both alike shall at last look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn as one mourneth for her only son.

## LECTURE X.

### THE OPEN BOOK.

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud ; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire : and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth : and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write : and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer : but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets. And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up ; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up ; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.—REV. x.

I. WE were told in the fifth chapter how the Prophet saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the



throne, a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. The seals have been broken. This book is now open. *The mighty angel whose face is as the sun*, holds it in his hand. I said we could not give a name to the book till we knew something of the contents of it. Are we able to name it now? First, we have heard that no one in heaven and earth, except the Lamb who was slain, had power to open it. The Lamb who unites the highest power with the highest suffering; the Lamb in whom is all the glory of Him that sits upon the throne, in whom is all the sorrow of man; He can read it, and enable us to read it. Here at least is one indication respecting the book. It must concern the relations between heaven and earth. It must tell what separates them, and whether they can ever be brought into reconciliation. Secondly, when the first four seals were broken, the four living creatures, the lion, the calf, the man, the eagle, each shewed us some power going forth on earth, not to bless but to destroy. Each of the earthly powers corresponded, it seemed, to one of these heavenly powers. Each was an aspect of God, divided from God, perverted into idolatry. The book, then, must shew us how earthly power has become severed from righteousness; whether it is ever to become the servant of righteousness. Thirdly, we heard of martyrs beneath the altar, who were crying for deliverance from the self-willed powers, who were confessing the self-sacrificing power. The book must be a book of the wars of those who have fought for good and truth against triumphant evil and falsehood, who have not lost their faith that what is weakest in the sight of mortals is strongest in the sight of God. Fourthly, we have the vision of a great convulsion,

which made all the powers of the earth that seemed to be supreme tremble, because they knew that the avenger was come, that the sufferer was indeed the king. The book then is to interpret those puzzling passages in human history which exhibit periods of revolution and anarchy. It shews them to be the necessary results of previous tyranny and defiance of law; it shews that there is a Divine purpose in them, and a Divine blessing to come out of them. So far I find everything in this book which answers to the Scriptural idea of prophecy, almost nothing which answers to the heathen idea of prediction. It is an unfolding or discovery of the meaning and purpose of the eternal God. It explains the principles of an unchangeable government. It exhibits a law working in the very vicissitudes and caprices of self-will. It applies, then, to the ages that had past before John came into the world; it applies to the time in which he was living. If, as St. Paul and the writers of the New Testament affirm, the ends of the ages were meeting in that age, the book must have a peculiar reference to it. By interpreting the century after the coming of Christ in the flesh, it throws back a light on all the centuries before He came in the flesh.

The passages which follow clearly identify the book as a book of judgment. And they do not leave that word "judgment" a vague one, such as it is apt to be in our minds. We are told *what* is judged; what *cannot* perish, what *must* perish in the judgment; what are the signs of judgment; how far God judges men and punishes men; how far men judge themselves and punish themselves. The subject of the judgment is a Nation. The vision of the sealed tribes taught us that there was an order in the nation

to be judged, which must survive any destruction of its outward forms. The vision of the company which no one could number, assured us that the existence of the nation did not interfere with the existence of a society that had no boundaries whatever. That the city or polity which was doomed, and round which the angel's trumpets were blowing, was that of Jerusalem, the direct language of the book led us to suppose. That would be the natural conclusion, supposing there were no stronger reasons on the other side. I have hinted at two reasons which have mainly influenced readers in rejecting this opinion, and adopting one that is more far-fetched. First, they have decided that the Apocalypse was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore that the trumpets of coming doom must point to some other city than that; next, they have regarded the more obvious meaning as poor and jejune, one which must rob the Apocalypse of all its instruction for later times.

To the first objection I answer, that if the traditional chronology of the Apocalypse, which assigns it to the reign of Domitian, can be maintained against the judgment of some of the most eminent of modern scholars—if it was not written, as those scholars suppose, in the time of Galba—the argument is still of no worth, except to those who identify prediction with prophecy. The Jews who lived after the temple had been destroyed, even after the ploughshare had gone round the walls, and the name of the city had been changed—events which did not happen till the time of Hadrian—still needed to understand what that great overthrow meant, what the Divine signs were which announced it. The Jew needed this illu-

mination, that he might not be utterly confounded by the language of his ancient records, which seemed to promise permanence to the city of David. The Gentile needed it no less. From Jerusalem that message had gone forth which had claimed him as one of God's family. St. Paul, however hated by his countrymen, however suspected even by the Jewish Church, had borne the alms and offerings of the Gentiles thither as a testimony of their obligations. When the Church lost its Capital, they might easily feel as if it had lost its Centre. The history of the second century tells us through what a sea of notions and theories respecting the visible and invisible world the Church had to pass, because the belief of such a Centre was so hard to realise. To know what Jerusalem was to the old world, what was to supply its place in the new, might be the most pressing and necessary learning for that time; if that time and subsequent times did not fully profit by it, perhaps it may be the more necessary for ours.

And so I come to the second objection, which I have noticed in former lectures, but which starts up continually before us, and which requires to be considered on various sides. We have certain notions about the bigness and smallness of events; about the information which we require and do not require for our practical guidance. It may be that the Divine measure of events is altogether different from ours; it may be that our Divine Teacher knows better what we are in need of than we know. To have a number of passages from Scripture which we can connect with what is taking place in the world, and by which we can divine what shall take place, may appear to us a great help in the conduct of our lives. He may regard the search for

these as only ministering to fever and restlessness, not to calm trust and brave action. He may wish to present the Scriptures to us as an organic whole, to show us how they interpret the life of one nation, and through that the life of all nations. He may desire that we should perceive the light which they throw upon the history and traditions of heathens, to whom we suppose that He was indifferent, but who were part of the world that Christ came to redeem. That our right estimate of the place of Jerusalem in the old world is needful to our right understanding of the modern world, I have said before; I believe St. John will teach us that truth in all his subsequent visions.

II. I cannot think that any preparations for the opening of a book which contains these records and lessons, are too vast or august. It seems but fitting that a *mighty angel should come down from heaven clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow about his head*, to present it as an open scroll. For we have now found that which is the most comforting and satisfactory name of all for it. St. John supplies it himself. It is the book of Unveiling; the Divine mind and purpose are gradually revealed in the dispensation of the ages. An unveiling of the very name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, is involved in that. The symbols which describe this angel are already familiar to us. He is clothed with a cloud. The outward form is hidden. He is known by the light which he brings with him. A rainbow on the head; the face like the sun; even the feet are of the same nature, only there is in them an element of heat as well as of light, of heat that may consume. No part of the universe is unaffected by His message. His right foot is on the sea, His left on the earth. The voice is one of terror;

not that musical one which is made by the sound of many waters, but loud as when a lion roareth.

III. There is something in the echoes which answer that voice, which cannot yet be proclaimed. "*And when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write, and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.*"

In a book of discovery, a book which scatters darkness, which interprets the confused voices that are continually ringing in our ears, and perplexing us with their dissonance, there is still a background which the spirit confesses and cannot reach into; there are still sounds which we must be content to believe are the utterances of God's voice, but which we cannot translate into our speech. Let so much be conceded to those who would represent the purposes and will of God as one great enigma, of which man can know nothing. Let us rejoice to think that there never has been, and never can be, such a lifting up of the veil as shall interfere with trust, and awe, and adoration. "*What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter,*" is the Divine message which every apostle and every man must hear when his Lord is stooping to wash his feet; must hear coming again from Gethsemane, and Calvary, and the deserted tomb. Yes, and so it will be when he goes out of the sight of mortal eyes. All through the ages upon ages, there must be still a step of the ladder which he has not climbed. But all through those ages upon ages, the voice of God is at the top of the ladder. And that voice is always bidding him come up higher. And he knows that nothing is kept back from him out of grudging jealousy; and he



knows that what is hidden must be more good and gracious than that which has been disclosed. Living under the government of a Being whose delight has been to make Himself manifest, he can wait in quietness and confidence. If he were living under a Being about whom there was nothing but guess and uncertainty, he would only cease to be restless when he ceased to be a man.

IV. "*And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*"

I cannot tell whether our translators really supposed these words to have the signification which is so frequently given them in sermons and popular religious treatises. There is no doubt to the ear something very grand in the phrase *time shall be no longer*. Such an announcement seems worthy of the oath of the Archangel. It is only when we come to ask ourselves what sense those sounds convey to us, what we suppose to be indicated by the end of time, that we discover we are embracing a cloud, and for the sake of that cloud are parting with most substantial realities. Do we actually suppose the prophet to say that a *time* shall come when *time* shall end, and when eternity shall begin? Do we attribute such bewildered notions to one who has been telling us in every line of his Gospel and his Epistles, of an eternal life which was with the

Father, and has been made known unto us—whose Apocalypse means nothing unless it means the unveiling of eternal mysteries to creatures who are living under the conditions of time? I need hardly tell you that if this abstract and absolute sense had been given to Time, the article must have been present. Philology, common-sense, and it seems to me the highest theology, have been sacrificed; partly because men have been unable to understand why such solemnity should have been given to the proclamation, that there should be no longer any *delay* in accomplishing the mystery of God; partly because they have had a dim notion that this accomplishment of the mystery of God must import a dissolution of the framework of the universe; which dissolution they supposed would be aptly represented as the end of time. But if the mystery of God which He hath declared to His prophets, be the mystery of the reconciliation and atonement of God with man, the mystery of the triumph of the Lamb over the Spirit of disobedience and self-will, the mystery of the conquest of the kingdoms of earth by the kingdom of heaven, then I believe that I am not departing from the language of Scripture or of sound theology, when I speak of *this* mystery as not awaiting its accomplishment in some far-off and imaginary time in which time shall cease, but as being accomplished at that crisis to which all the previous words in this vision of the trumpets have been pointing.

The perplexities which beset this subject arise in no slight degree from some forms of speech, which are useful in themselves and which have become habitual to us, but which we repeat till they bewilder and mislead us. No distinction is more important for some purposes than that between the Old and the New

Testament. There is a clear outward boundary between them, the boundary of language. Nearly 400 years separate the last of the Hebrew writers from the earliest of the Hellenistic. The inward differences appear to be even more deeply marked. Jews of course have the strongest interest in dwelling upon them. The New Testament is for them the contradiction of the old. Romanists are eager to show how the national life of the Jew is extinguished in the universal life of the Church. Protestants are anxious to show that we are not under the law but under grace. A large and increasing school of liberal writers are even more eager than all of these to assert that the new dispensation has swallowed up or subverted the old. And yet none of these deny or wish to deny the Jewish character of the Gospels, Epistles, or Apocalypse. As little can they deny that the Apostles and Evangelists did belong to the last forty or fifty years of the Jewish Commonwealth. If any are disposed to refer some of the books which pass under their names to a later period, all the events which they profess to record undoubtedly fall within this. Supposing, then, that we connected these writers, as they appear to connect themselves, with the earlier prophets and teachers of their land; supposing they did believe, as they say they believed, that the events of which they speak are the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets; supposing they did look, as they seem to have looked, for a kingdom of heaven to rise out of the kingdom of David, and to embrace the Gentiles within it; would this language *then* sound fantastic or impossible? Would not the destruction of Jerusalem be the winding-up of that series of events—the incarnation, death, resurrection, glorification, of Christ—which were them-

selves that finishing of the mystery of God, which He had promised to His servants the prophets? I can only ask those who think scornfully of the writers of the New Testament, who regard them as ignorant and narrow Jews, to consider whether this is not actually what they *do* say; whether I am not giving the force and upshot of their words, be those words Divine or human, wise or unwise? But I may surely ask those who set great—though not in my judgment too great—store by the letter of Scripture, who receive its words as oracles, to consider what those words are; to consider whether taken simply they do not contain the Gospel of a finished salvation to men; whether, if that is so, it was not a fitting occasion for an angel to swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the earth, and the sea and all things therein; because the glorious purpose for which the Jewish nation had existed was brought to pass; because the gods of heaven, sea, earth, were now to bow before the one living God, the Lord God of Israel; because a dispensation was to begin which was grounded upon the regeneration of humanity in the Son of Man; because a Divine Spirit could abide with men and make His temple in their hearts and bodies.

V. “*And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go, and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.*”

Nearly every passage of the Apocalypse, as I have observed already, recalls some passage of an elder prophet. When the prophet Ezekiel, sitting by the river Chebar, had seen that "*appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord,*" which corresponds to the vision in the fourth chapter of this book, he heard a voice, saying unto him, "*Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me : they and their fathers have transgressed against me unto this very day. . . . And thou, Son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be thou afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions ; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. . . . But thou, Son of man, hear what I say unto thee ; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house : open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me ; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein ; and he spread it before me ; and it was written within and without : and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest ; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it ; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.*" The work of Ezekiel, as it is set forth here, had reference to the Israelites in Babylon. His message to them concerned the desolation and restoration of their city, and above all, of the Temple. It would not be listened to ; the prophet would be scorned and hated by his countrymen. But the words were to be



spoken, whether heeded or rejected. They were to remain for the generation to come. St. John, falling on a different age, hears the like tidings of lamentation, and mourning, and woe, which his predecessor had heard. He is speaking to the same rebellious house. He finds that house subject to a tyranny like in essentials to the Babylonian tyranny. It is awaiting a more tremendous overthrow. The roll of St. John, like the roll of Ezekiel, speaks of a temple that is to fall, and of a temple that is to rise out of its ruins. And St. John, like Ezekiel, must eat the roll. Its words must not be merely read, they must be taken with all their bitterness and all their sweetness into his inmost being. In this respect the ages which have elapsed between the seer at Chebar and the seer at Patmos make no difference. Living words, words that are things, words that are written down only because they have been acted, or are to be acted, must be received into the man before they can be uttered by him. He must know them by heart, not by rote. So it was in those old times; so it has been in the times since; so it shall be in our times. In easy days the words of all books, and of the Bible especially, furnish famous topics for criticism and debate! Such eloquent comments are written upon them; they can be tortured to such different senses; they can be proved to mean everything, anything, nothing. In times of stress and anguish they are devoured. They are taken not to soothe the reader, nor to condemn those whom he dislikes. He receives them as they are. They nourish him by their bitter qualities as much as by their pleasant; he needs both and accepts both. He begs for no exposition of them; they come charged with a tremendous exposition of



what he was and what he is ; he demands no evidence about them ; they bring it with them.

But why should the book be sweet like honey in the mouth, if it is so full of woe ? Why should it be bitter afterwards, if it is God's book ? Ezekiel and St. John had the same experience in this respect. Nor would our case, I conceive, be different if we did indeed eat the words, if they really entered into us. There must be a sweetness unspeakable in the actual living taste of a Divine communication ; in the assurance—felt in the blood, felt along the heart—that a portion of that law by which we are governed has been disclosed to us ; that the love which lies beneath all law and is working at every moment for the welfare and renovation of the creatures which it has called into existence is showing itself forth in our very selves. Sweet as honey ! But then the sense of this law defied in the world, defied in ourselves ? of that love trampled upon and resisted in the kingdoms of men and in the kingdom within us ? Is there no revulsion in that ? Does not the book become the bitterer afterwards, in proportion as it was delicious at first ? There may be a return to that early joy ; there may be a deeper joy that springs out of conflict and suffering ; but whenever the messages and revelations of history and prophecy are digested thoroughly, there must be sorrow. For is not the Man of sorrow He of whom they speak, and He who interprets them ?

There was a special cause for the sorrow in the case of the Apostle John. He might have hoped that the open book would have told him the judgment on the great Babel empire of the world. It had made known to him the judgment of the chosen witness against that empire. The seventh trumpet might have announced

the fall of Rome. No! when it sounds Jerusalem will fall. And is this, then, the end of all? Is the mystery of God spoken of by the prophets really satisfied in this ruin? For a moment it appears so. The book is open, the dispensation is closing. But the voices of the seven thunders which were not to be written down may still sound when the trumpets have ceased. There may be glimpses into the dispensation which is coming. The oppressor may not be intended to reign for ever. Only one-half of the seer's task is performed. "*And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again unto many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.*"

## LECTURE XI.

### THE TWO WITNESSES.

And there was given me a reed like unto a rod; and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and

in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand : and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past ; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded ; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come ; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great ; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament : and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.—REV. xi.

WE enter to-day upon what I venture to call the second part of the Apocalypse. I do not make that division in conformity with any theory of mine. The seer is told that when the seventh angel sounds the mystery of God will be finished, but that he must prophesy again before many kindreds, and tongues, and nations, and kings.

I have assumed that the prophet is speaking of Jerusalem. Six blasts have proclaimed that it is about to fall. It has not fallen yet. The vision before us speaks of a period of twelve hundred and sixty days, or forty-two months. We commonly reckon a period of about four years between the commencement of the Jewish rebellion, consequent upon the oppression of Florus, and the termination of the war by Titus. If I take this time, or a portion of it, to be indicated by the twelve hundred and sixty days, I shall at least be nearer to a strict interpretation than if I changed the days into years ; less liable to be imposed upon by

tricks of my fancy, than if I were obliged to guess which is the starting point and conclusion of those years in the history of Christendom. How that short interval was filled up, with what horrors in the whole empire, with what special and unspeakable horrors in the city of Jerusalem, I need not say. Since the confusion was general, the wild fanatics in the holy city might easily persuade themselves that the other city, the tyrant city, would fall first. The Capitol was burnt before the Temple was burnt. The outrages of Vitellius might draw down the Divine vengeance as much as the outrages of John or Simon. While the holy place stood there might always be some signal interposition to save it and destroy the besiegers, like that which had occurred when Sennacherib was invading it in the days of Hezekiah.

I. *“And there was given me a reed, like unto a rod, and the angel stood, saying, Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court that is without the temple, leave out and measure it not, for it is given unto the Gentiles : and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”*

The parallel here is obvious and direct. The prophecy of Ezekiel refers, more than any other, to the Temple. Its desecration by the idolatries of its worshippers ; its coming ruin by the Babylonian power ; the meaning of its symbols to those who dwelt amongst the idolaters of Chaldæa, doubtless had filled his soul. Then comes the prospect of restoration. In his fortieth chapter we hear how he is transported in spirit to the land of Israel, and how he *“sees a man with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed.”* With these he measures all the parts of the city, and especially the different courts of the Temple. The prophet learns

what that building is to be which he may not behold with his eyes, but in which his countrymen will one day worship the God of their fathers.

The command to St. John to come and measure must at once bring the vision of his predecessor before him. Is he, too, a prophet of restoration? Is the Temple to perish, and to rise again after seventy years? Is there to be a New Jerusalem in his day, such as there was after the captivity?

The rest of the Apocalypse is an answer, I believe, to these questions. This chapter introduces the period of 1260 days. It explains what is passing in them, and what they signify. It assumes them to be a period of utter darkness and desolation. But it shows that in that darkest time the old witnesses of God were not extinct; that even then they were doing the work which they had always done. The prophet will not scatter a delusion till he has given a substitute for it. All that is contained in city and Temple is doomed. No fire will come down from heaven to destroy the besiegers. The fall is delayed, but it is certain. But those also are not wrong who say that there is an immortality in it, and its altars, and its worshippers. That immortality will be made manifest by the very destruction which is impending. One who purged it of the traffickers that were defiling it, said, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again. When those who heard the words saw Him appearing out of the grave of Joseph, they knew that He spake of the temple of His body. That was one fulfilment of them; there could yet be another. The temple of stone was not to have one stone left upon another; but the work for which it existed, the work which it had already to do for the world, might be accomplished. A better resurrection



than that which had cheered the soul of Ezekiel was approaching. What it was would be shown more and more clearly to the spirit of St. John. In the meantime, he was not to measure those courts which Ezekiel had measured; he was to leave them out; the desecration which they underwent in the 1260 days was a sign that the better days, the diviner polity, had no connexion with them.

II. *“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite them with all plagues as often as they will.”*

Those who seek to discover what these two witnesses are, from extraneous sources, have an illimitable region for their fancy to work upon. I shall confine myself to the indications that are furnished by the passage itself and by those in the Old Testament to which it directs us.

The allusion here is to one of the prophets who saw the Temple rising out of its ruins, and cheered those who feared that their own weakness and the opposition of their enemies would never suffer it to be completed. The prophet Zechariah, in his third chapter, has had a vision of Joshua, the high priest of that day, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. *“And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord*

*that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"* At first Joshua is clothed in filthy garments. These are taken from him. He is invested with the mitre and with the sacerdotal robes. All the dignity of his office is restored to him. Then in the fourth chapter we read, "*And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof, and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?"* The answer is not what we expect. It is, "*This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.*" The prophet is then told that the hands of Zerubbabel which have laid the foundation of the house shall also finish it. When he repeats his inquiry about the olive trees, he is told, "*These are the two anointed ones, that stand before the Lord of the whole earth.*"

I believe, if we consider this passage, the very points in it which cause us difficulty, its apparent digressions and incoherencies, will help us to the meaning of the Apocalyptic witnesses. Joshua and Zerubbabel are evidently the priest and the judge of the city which is rising out of its ruins. Connected with these men, who represent the great offices of the commonwealth, is a vision of the Temple itself, in which Joshua is to minister, which Zerubbabel is to build. This vision is not of the outward and material building, but of two

of its old symbols, which most represent its spiritual character and intent. In its highest grandeur, in its deepest depression, it has still been testifying of an everlasting LAW proceeding from the invisible God of righteousness, of a uniting and living COMMUNION between Him and His creatures. The Word that comes from His lips, the Spirit that goes forth to quicken the creatures whom He has made in His image, these anointed ones who stand continually before the God of the earth, are presented to men in the ordinances of Law and Sacrifice, in the persons of the Judge and the Priest. They had lasted from the earliest times: when Elijah, in the days of Ahab, was permitted to bear witness against the Baal worship by forbidding the heavens to send down rain during the days of his prophecy; when, centuries before that time, Moses had turned the waters of the Nile into blood, that Pharaoh might know the Lord of the earth to be the Deliverer of captives; they had been acting as these witnesses. They had been showing that Divine power did not dwell with that which looked powerful, but with that which looked weak. They, as much as Zerubbabel, had been establishing the maxim, "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.*" And so it was now. The witnesses in the midst of Jerusalem were witnesses that a fire would come forth from the righteous God to sweep away the enemies of righteousness, whoever they were.

III. "*And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.*"

A time, however, was to come when these witnesses

for the existence of law and of God's care for men should be silenced. I cannot tell whether there is an allusion to any particular event in the siege of Jerusalem, which signally denoted the extinction of the last fragment of moral restraint and of belief in that which is not evil. Probably there is. Probably the allusion would have been intelligible to some in that day who needed it. We do not need the specific fact, but the principle which was denoted by it. What concerns us, is to understand that there was a critical moment in the history of that falling city, as there is in the history of all falling cities, when its crimes reached their climax, when the hindrances that had been opposed to them ceased to work. The murderer of the witnesses is described here as the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit. More will be told us of him hereafter. Enough is said here to indicate that mere brute force, ungoverned lust and self-will, became triumphant over all that opposed them. These were to all intents and purposes the lords of the Holy City. So much the Jewish historian would have told us. A seer was wanted, not to record or repeat the announcement, but to tell us what is implied in it. The witnesses that perished in Jerusalem were the witnesses of God's government, of God's mercy to the world. The slaying of those witnesses could not affect Jerusalem only; must affect all mankind.

IV. "*And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations, shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.*"

In the first of these verses, the place in which these

witnesses dwelt, is identified as the place in which our Lord was crucified. Jerusalem is not more clearly denoted by that description than by the other, that it is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. What city, during the year of its siege, more fulfilled the idea of a Sodom, in which all law and all humanity were obliterated—of an Egypt, in which religion had become the great instrument of darkness and oppression, the denial of God, the stimulus to every crime? When the dead bodies of the witnesses are said to lie in the street of this city, it is intimated, I conceive, that *there* was the most conspicuous example ever furnished of the decay and putrefaction of institutions, that had been set to diffuse life through the nations. When it is said that the people, and kindreds, and tongues, and nations, would not suffer them to be buried, it is intimated that the heathen round about preferred that Jerusalem should remain a sink of filth and iniquity, a spectacle of what had been the end of its grand profession of a peculiar worship, than that it should at once be swept away from the earth. For a little while, not much longer than that time during which the Son of God Himself remained under the power of death and the grave, the city of Jerusalem—so men decreed, so God willed—was to be a sign and witness of the evil that is possible upon the earth, which is only possible when it is the corruption of the highest good.

V. “*And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt upon the earth.*” A sense of liberation from the restraints of law, from the belief of anything invisible, is set forth very livingly in these words. It has come to different nations in different periods; always, I believe, has



been the effect of the demoralisation and degradation of some society which had high trusts, and had sunk through its boasting to a lower level than those whom it pretended to warn and to guide. That there should be this savage glee and mutual self-congratulation in idolaters who had been tormented by the witnesses which the Jewish law and worship bore against their impurities, and that an actual loosening of all moral ties such as had not been known before should have been connected with this feeling, we might well conjecture, if we had not information from the most trustworthy sources of the actual shaking of Roman society in the time after the death of Nero.

VI. *“And after three days and an half, the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.”* Here we have a key to the subject of the whole vision. Forms and institutions which were not only time-honoured, but which could claim a Divine origin, which had been upholden by the Divine might, wither and perish. The world thinks they are to perish for ever. That is the moment of their transfiguration and glorification. Then they are discovered to bear a life which is dependent upon no accidents of time and place.

All things above and below express their presence, testify of their authority. The fears which strike the



consciences of those who had defied them most, are the signs of that presence and that authority. The rapid disappearance of some power which had asserted its independence of them ; the confessions, conscious and unconscious, of a God of heaven, which follow a period of utter indifference and unbelief ; these shew that the witnesses have ascended. If they lose their local habitation and name, it is that they may claim a universal predominance.

The truth of the words has been illustrated at various periods ; no wonder that one and another has claimed them for itself. I believe we vindicate them for all, by accepting them as directly referring to that crisis of which I have spoken. That the Roman world, after being shaken from its centre to its circumference, was struck with a great fear ; that when Vespasian ascended the throne, it did again accept a righteous and orderly government, or, as the prophet expresses it, did homage to the God of heaven ; that there was no similar revival, but a wilder fury, a more utter brutality among those who professed to do homage to the God of heaven in the holy city ; that the very restoration of order in Rome was therefore the signal for the doom of Jerusalem, we learn from history ; this I apprehend is what the prophet means when he says, "*The second woe is past, and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.*" The great earthquake of Rome is over ; the restorer and deliverer of that city is the predestined destroyer of this. For now,

VII. "*The seventh angel soundeth.*" That the fall of the Temple follows immediately the blast of the trumpet, I gather not only from all that has preceded in this chapter, but from the last verse of it. "*And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament; and there were lightnings,*

*and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail."* The temple in heaven is the background to the picture of that great fire which is consuming the temple on earth. The ark and the covenant are seen to be there; the lightnings and thunderings which shatter the one, discover the other. And so it comes to pass that what appeared the most awful of all calamities is thus celebrated: "*And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*" As I spoke last Sunday of "*the finishing of the mystery of God,*" which we are promised "*in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound,*" I need not dwell long on these words, because, wonderful as they are, they are the necessary sequel to that commencement. If the temple on Mount Moriah testified of a Lord God of Israel whom no man had seen or could see, of an anointed king who should reign over the house of David, and of whose kingdom there should be no end; the fall of that temple either proved that testimony to be false, or declared that the Lord God of Israel was the Lord God of all the nations of the earth, that the Son of David was the King of men. In terms, all Christians admit that the passing away of the Jewish polity involved this proclamation. There are hymns which are taught to English children about God now calling the world His own, and about heathens tasting His grace. But we have come to regard these as merely rhetorical phrases. We say that *in a sense* it is no doubt true that God reigns over the nations; meaning that in every practical and important sense it is not true. Therefore when we hear of voices in heaven solemnly declaring that the kingdoms of this world are the kingdoms of God and

His Christ, we naturally say that they must refer to some quite different event from the fall of Jerusalem, to some period that we have never reached. For we have a reasonable confidence that in the language of heaven there are no rhetorical phrases; that its hymns celebrate real and not fictitious blessings. It would indeed be daring profaneness to confound our idle talk about the world being God's world with that ascription of which St. John speaks in the sixteenth verse.

VIII. *"And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned."* But would it be profaneness if we supposed them to understand the vital significance of events which we have emptied of their significance? Would it be profaneness to confess that we have been utterly unthankful for that which ought to have filled us with wonder and gratitude? Would it be profaneness to inquire whether the Apostles had any message to deliver to the world at all—whether we have any—if the message is not this, that the kingdoms of the world do belong to God and to His Christ, and not to the tyrants who have claimed them, not to the devil or his angels?

IX. At all events I believe we shall find that this and no other is the doctrine of the Apocalypse, the one which forces itself upon us more and more in each vision that follows this of the overthrow of the holy city and Temple. If the visions were all brilliant and joyful, we might indeed have good ground for concluding that they had nothing to do with the last eighteen hundred years of the world, or with our day. But they are pictures of fierce conflict. The news that God has taken His great

power, and is reigning, which awakes such joy in heavens, finds only little faith in earth. "*The nations*," it is said, "*were angry*." They did not like to be told of a righteous Judge. They were not eager to confess One who cared for the poor and the outcast, or who had taken their nature, and had died their death. The government of God and His Christ were too utterly unlike their own that they should wish to be under it. But it is added, "*Thy wrath is come*." Their wish could not interfere with the fact. They were angry because they felt there was a power over them with which they were not in harmony, and which would prevail against them. And this power the prophet goes on to tell us is felt in the world of the dead, as well as of the quick. Being the power of Him who was and is and is to come, being the power of the Lamb which was slain, who lives for ever and ever, it cannot be fixed by mortal boundaries; it cannot be limited by the sleep that rounds our year.

X. "*It was the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, both small and great*." I take the words as I find them; they may shatter some notions and theories of ours; they may open to us visions of judgment which are different from those which we have inherited or have fashioned for ourselves. But if they are revelations of God, we must not shrink from them. We may be sure that they will deepen and expand our faith, not shake it; that they will not lessen our awe, but make it more habitual and more effectual; that if they forbid any thoughts of God which are inconsistent with a belief in His perfect love, in His full redemption, they will not allow us to impute to Him or to cherish ourselves any the slightest tolerance for

evil. The time is come that thou "*shouldest destroy them that destroy the earth.*" This was a cause for the exultation of the elders when the earthly temple fell, when the heavenly temple was opened; this must reconcile us to the fall of even that which is dearest and most hallowed in our eyes—which has been dearest and most hallowed in God's eyes—if it ceases to be a witness for Him, if it hides the ark of His testament from men.

## LECTURE XII.

### THE WOMAN AND THE MAN-CHILD.

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the



man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.—REV. xii.

IN the last vision the earthly temple disappeared, a temple in heaven was opened. The first sight presented to the spirit of the prophet in that higher region, is a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

It must have been indeed a wonder to him. There could have been no more striking discovery of the contrast between the old world which was passing away, and the new world which was commencing. That old world has often been called in praise or in disparagement a male world. The epithet applies at least as forcibly to the Jew as to the Roman. It would be the greatest injustice to either to say that the reverence for women was wanting in them. It was cultivated in the Jew by all his institutions, by all his prophecies; it gives a colouring to some of the most striking legends, as well as to some of the most unquestioned records which the Roman republican cherished. But the man was called out to be the servant and witness of Jehovah, especially by those acts in which the woman could not share. The dread lest some other than a male standard of worth should creep into the State and destroy its nerve, was a chief reason why the elder Romans dreaded the incursion of the art and learning of Greece. For there had been in that land a floating

vision of transcendent beauty, which could not be embodied merely in an Apollo. Pallas and Aphrodite had disputed the supremacy with him, though the sternness of the first, and the merely passive grace of the second, had shown how difficult it was, and how dangerous, to lose sight of the other ideal.

What the change means, whether it has necessarily involved the growth of effeminacy, whether it implies progress or declension, are questions which have occupied thinkers much in all times, never more than in this time. This heavenly vision, connected as it is with the whole purpose of the Apocalypse—beginning, as it does, a series of visions—may, I believe, throw a light upon this subject which we want scarcely more for the study of history, than for our own daily and practical guidance.

I. The wonder which the Apostle saw is exactly the wonder which has accompanied Christendom through all the different stages of its life and growth. The mother and the child, under one aspect or another, have been present to all who have tried to satisfy themselves what the human is, and how it is related to the Divine. All have felt more or less distinctly, "What we are seeking for is there; how, we cannot tell. Perhaps it cannot be put into words at all. Perhaps the symbol is itself all that we need." Romanists and Protestants have felt their difference, their intense opposition, nowhere more strongly than when this subject forces itself—as it is always forcing itself—upon them. They are conscious that *there* must lie the very secret of their dissensions. And yet they have a dim feeling that there also, if they could penetrate a little deeper, might lie the secret of reconciliation. May not some neglect or inversion of the law which binds this mother to this child, explain a number of

corruptions which have made men in the new world sigh for what seemed to them the simpler and manlier glories of the old? May not the true perception of that law vindicate both the old and the new, and prove that the latter is indeed a blessed unfolding of that which was hidden or imperfect in the former? May not the book which professes to be a revelation of Jesus Christ, give us that unfolding?

The woman is clothed with the sun. She has no brightness or glory in herself. Yet she is covered with a brightness and glory. She dwells in the perfect light. She is able to look up to the source of light. The crown of twelve stars on her head distinguishes the brightness which is about herself, which to those who contemplate her from beneath seems to be hers, from that which she herself perceives, from that true Divinity which she confesses and worships. The moon at her feet shows that there is a reflection of this Divinity coming from herself, but of which she must not become enamoured. If that image attracts her, the fate of Narcissus will be hers : her self-love will be her destruction.

Here is a very striking symbol of humanity. No one which is derived from the old world is anything like so complete. That male ideal of which I spoke struggles in vain to be more than national. In aspiring to be more in the Greek, it sank into effeminacy and slavery. In aspiring to be more in the Roman, it passed into imperialism. In aspiring to be more in the Jew, it was either changed into the narrowest sectarianism, or else burst forth into this very type of humanity that we are contemplating.

II. But though more perfect than anything that the world had yet seen, it is still imperfect. Another element is wanting. "*And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.*" Something is needed

to connect this female ideal with the male ideal of the former ages. *That* must be expanded as well as *this*. *That* must be brought into closest harmony with *this*. The woman is not merely looking up to a light above her. She is struggling with a birth. The Divine must be above the human ; but it must also come forth from the human. There must be a man-child. All the struggles and conflicts in society and in the individual man are throes preceding that birth. All the conflicts which the individual man or society has undergone, are conflicts whether that child shall live or die. For—

III. “*There appeared another wonder in heaven. And behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.*” I must again remind you that the last vision of the Apocalypse—if we interpret it as I try to interpret it, strictly—points to a certain critical moment in the world’s history ; as I think, to that period of three or four years in which Jerusalem was threatened by the Roman armies, and in which Rome herself was passing through what looked like a death-struggle. Seen from above, what does this crisis signify ? It signifies the struggle whether humanity shall have its true and righteous king, or whether another power shall rule over it, and receive its homage. That power is represented as a bloody dragon. The Lamb, you will remember, had the seven horns and the seven eyes that are the seven Spirits of God going forth in all the earth. There we have the symbol of concentrated harmonised power, proceeding from one loving Will, directed to one loving end. There we have the symbol of life in all its

various measures and forms, proceeding from the Source of life, to quicken, renovate, unite. Here we have the antagonist symbol. Seven heads and ten horns. Powers intellectual and physical, going forth not from one creative mind, to accomplish in divers ways a blessed result; but going forth from a destructive mind—destructive, and therefore broken into different shapes to spread death. This is the dragon who has been fighting in all generations of the world with man; fighting to separate him from the loving and eternal God; fighting that he may see that God under divided forms, that he may mistake and pervert His purposes, that he may frame the Divine Spirit out of his own thoughts and conceptions, instead of suffering those thoughts and conceptions to be moulded and re-formed by the Divine Spirit. This is the dragon, therefore, who sought to tempt the Divine Son while He was upon earth into a distrust and denial of His Father, into separating Himself from the creatures whose nature He had taken. And that same dragon is represented here as struggling that men may not confess the Conqueror of the evil spirit as at once the Son of Man and the Son of God.

This dragon is said to draw the third part of the stars of heaven, and to cast them to the earth. Whenever spiritual beings are led to worship themselves, to glory in their own power, to reverence power for its own sake, they are drawn down from heaven to the earth. Being stars meant to diffuse light, they become powers of darkness. All creation suffers a blight from their influence. That there has been such a fall of spirits, men have believed. If you ask me how many texts of Scripture they have had to sustain their belief, I should be disposed to answer, "If they had but this one, it

would be all the more remarkable that the faith should have such prevalency, that it should have exercised dominion over so many different ages, have penetrated so deeply into the heart of nations, have embodied itself in so many various forms of art and literature, have defied so much scorn and incredulity." And this faith, though it may have various anticipations and foretastes in the ancient world, is strictly a Christendom faith. The revelation of our own spiritual capacities and temptations has shown us how the tail of the dragon might sweep down the stars of heaven. Every man has known at some crisis or other of his life aspirations, intuitions, hopes, which could not have belonged to an animal, which must belong to a spirit. He has felt that these were emphatically *human* aspirations, intuitions, hopes. They were not his. They raised him above himself. They made him understand what other men and other ages had felt. They found their utterance in cries for deliverance, in acts of thanksgiving. He knew that he had something in him which was capable of communion with that which he could not comprehend. It is possible, we all know it is, to fall from this state of mind; to treat it as utterly fantastical and ridiculous; to hate it at the same time, as if the sense of it were haunting us and we could not send it away. And so the thought how spirits may have fallen connects itself with that resistance which we are conscious of when our own are trying to rise. Is there not One who knows all our wants, is helping us against our enemies, is offering Himself to us as the Divine man, the Lord of our spirits? Is not that the Man-child—feeble, yet mighty? Is not the dragon seeking to slay Him as soon as He is born?

IV. "*And she brought forth a man-child, who was to*



*rule all nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and to his throne."* We shall be celebrating this week the mystery of our Lord's ascension. Has that mystery anything to do with the words I have just read to you? It seems to me, my brethren, that all the acts of our Lord's life, His Birth of the Virgin, His Cross, and Passion, and Resurrection, have to do with them. All were steps in the manifestation of the true King and Conqueror of men. All were steps in the redemption of humanity. And the act of ascension was, if we believe St. Paul, the highest of these acts; the leading of man's captivity captive, the declaration of Christ's royalty. I would never separate *that* ascension from the one which is spoken of here. The very effect and worth of heavenly visions is to bring under one law and principle events which in the records of time are divided. In this case I do not think they are divided by any wide interval. The words, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled,*" are words which I have accepted throughout these Lectures in their literal force. At that moment, when the kingdom of God upon earth was apparently ceasing to be, when the pledges of any union between heaven and earth were departing, then is the kingdom of heaven, which Christ had preached, actually inaugurated, then the pledges of union are substantiated. That disappearance of signs is itself the sign that the representative of humanity is caught up to God and His Throne.

Divines have a technical way of treating this subject. They speak of an actual Christ who was born into the world, and of a mystical Christ who is born in the hearts of some men. Philosophical students of history have profited by this distinction, and have represented

the Christian idea as merely an idea, and have shewn how such an idea had been floating in the minds of men in all different countries and ages of the world. It seems to me that St. John the divine understood the whole matter better than later divines, and that by him the actual Christ and the mystical Christ are never separated. No one is so careful to set forth the Man who sat by the well, who ate the Passover supper, whose soul was troubled, whose feet and hands were pierced with the nails. No one is so certain that this was the Word, who had been the light of every man, made flesh. So when He had died for the sheep, and risen again, He does but return to His natural state, to the glory which He had with the Father before the worlds were. But He returned after having made it known to His disciples that He is the Vine and they the branches; that all their life is from Him and in Him; that apart from Him they are nothing, and can do nothing. What He had taught them, He sent them to teach the world. Each man who received the message, discovered Christ to be the teacher of his spirit, the source of his life. His conscience had told him of such an one before; now he knew His name. The Jewish prophecies, heathen traditions, had said that the world must have a Divine king, who was also a human king. When the Jewish world passed away, He is revealed as Lord of the universe. The woman has brought forth the Man-child. He is to rule the nations with a rod of iron. Humanity is not commencing a feminine age; though, contemplated in its earthly condition merely, that is the highest and the most universal symbol under which it can be represented. There is to be dominion and government; the Man-child is to rule the nations. There is to be no

lazy tenderness. With the rod of His wrath He is to slay the wicked. It is the rod of a shepherd; but a rod of iron too; let the tyrants of the earth know it and tremble.

V. *"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three score days."*

Can all commentators have been mistaken in supposing that the woman here must mean the Church? If not, must I not change the force which I gave to the symbol in the previous passage? I cannot doubt that the commentators are right, and that this vision does describe the condition of the Church during a period of peculiar desolation. But since the Apostle does not use those images which he used before, I think we are bound to ask the reason of the change, and to learn the new lesson which it must be meant to teach us. When he spoke of six candlesticks, and said that the candlesticks were Churches, I took it for granted that he intended to speak of the Churches as lights of the world; when he speaks of a woman without saying that he intends the Church, I cannot merely substitute one name for the other; I must ascertain from the context and the analogy of Scripture what the natural force of the symbol is, and then, if the occasion appears to demand it, apply the discovery to the Church. So doing, we may hope to arrive at the idea of the Church in the mind of St. John, instead of forcing one of our own upon him.

Supposing the twelve hundred and sixty days to be that period of darkness when the old witnesses of law and priesthood were prophesying in sackcloth and were about for a time to be destroyed,—supposing that to have been the crisis in which humanity was translated

to a new glory, her Divine representative being caught up to the throne of God; where shall we seek for the representative of her new condition upon earth? Not in the city of Jerusalem; that has been denying this glory of man, that is to perish in its denial. But those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that He does stand at the right hand of God, their Mediator and Advocate—they, banished from the city, with no country they can properly call their home, with no visible fellowship or unity, are nevertheless maintaining the true greatness of the race; they are claiming the rights of spirits, they overlook the boundaries of space and time; they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The records of the Church during those particular years, even during all the latter years of the first century, are especially scanty and bewildering. Its numbers must have been greatly diminished; the love of many, as our Lord foretold, must have waxed cold. Hints are given by Eusebius which seem to reflect the confusion of the time in the Church—of a declension which soon after took place, especially in Palestine. In them are dim records of a flight to Pella. Bishops are said to have succeeded one another with incredible rapidity; often they bear heathen names. That the Church should have survived at all through such a time was altogether wonderful in mortal eyes. No more perfect account of the preservation can be given than that which is contained in the text. "*She had a place prepared by God;*" she was kept alive in the wilderness for twelve hundred and sixty days.

VI. And is that all? Have we only an account of a few scattered Christians without a visible refuge or home.

for three or four years ? It is not quite all. We have another record besides this.

*“And there was war in heaven : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not ; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world : he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”* That insignificant spectacle of a set of poor men, exiles from cities, unrecognised upon earth, is suddenly changed for this wonderful spectacle of the hosts of heaven, pouring forth their shouts and congratulations for the greatest victory that had ever been won. What was the victory ? The words describe it clearly enough if we will give heed to them. There had been a tremendous barrier between man and God. An enemy was every moment arraigning man as a rebel, ever arraigning God as a tyrant. And now the Man-child presented men to God as redeemed, justified, perfected in Him ; God to men as their loving Father who had given up His only Son for them. The battle in heaven had this subject and this issue, no other. Was there indeed a bond of peace and fellowship between it and earth ? Was it indeed possible for man to meet God, and God to meet man ? Was there One in whom both could be well pleased ? Was God draw-



ing men to Him or putting them from Him?—seeking to save them or to damn them?

Whatever other dreams we may have dreamt of the casting of the Devil and his angels out of heaven, this is St. John's account of it. The accuser of the brethren is no longer able to tear the creature from the Creator. They are made one in the well-beloved Son. "*And now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.*" The two are inseparably, eternally linked together. Christ has not put forth any power to change the will of the Father. His power has been manifested in fulfilling that will, in making it effectual. It is not God who has been keeping men at a distance from Him; it is the foe of God. He is the condemner; God is the Justifier.

These are not principles, my brethren, that lasted twelve hundred and sixty days. They were proved in those twelve hundred and sixty days; they were established in those days when the world looked most dreary and hopeless, as the principles upon which Christendom and the whole world were standing. For the men in those days overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of His testimony. The blood of the Lamb was a perpetual witness to them that God had reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. The blood of the Lamb was a living sacrament of a perpetual and living union between the children on earth and their Father in heaven. And the word of this testimony was, that God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for it. These were the answers to the accuser, which rose above all the arguments and subtleties with which he would persuade men that they are an accursed, and not a redeemed and blessed race; that death is a



sign of separation from God, and from each other, as it must be when we contemplate it in any individual case, not a bond of reconciliation and atonement to God, and to each other, as it must be when we contemplate it in the death of Christ, the Head, and Representative, and Redeemer, of the whole race. Therefore, these witnesses did not love their lives unto the death; they could throw away their lives as witnesses for the truth, knowing that the truth was worth more than their lives, and that they might trust their lives with the God of Truth. The male courage of the old time had not departed. The Christian martyrs were to be the guardians and transmitters of it.

VII. *“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, and the seas, for the devil is come down to you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”*

The dragon was cast down from heaven. Those who claimed their portion in God saw an unclouded face. Those who looked into the eternal world, which had been so full of dark shadows, perceived that it was full of light. This vision was not for angels, but for sinful, dying men. The kingdom of heaven had been opened to them by Him who had borne sin and overcome the sharpness of death; in the midst of torments they might dwell in it. The woe and trouble were for those who inhabited the earth and the sea; for those who could not look beyond the visible and temporal. These had been redeemed; these had been united to the other world. But if they did not own the reconciliation, if they tried to interpret the universe by the events which were passing in it, they could find no excuse for hope; everything was a reason for despair. It was a time of devil ascendancy over the world;—a short time, for

whatever our unbelief may pretend, the times of such ascendancy are short; they wind up long periods of indifference and heartlessness; they act as cures for Atheism; they drive men, in spite of themselves, to a good God. But who can tell how fearful they are while they last! Who can measure the anguish of them by minutes or by years!

VIII. *"And when the dragon saw that he was cast upon the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child. And to her were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, to her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent."*

The child is beyond the dragon's reach. He has triumphed. The mother of the child is still open to his violence. That is the formula for the history of the modern world; for the history of Humanity since the manifestation of the Son of Man. Part of the battle, and that the most tremendous part, which St. John calls the battle in heaven, had been fought. But the battle of the woman, a battle with the dragon in his various aspects; now tempting by prosperity, now by adversity; now one head and one horn prominent, now another; this had to be fought; this is the subject of all records from the days of St. John to our own.

I do not, however, extend the direct application of this passage beyond the crisis to which I have alluded already. The expression "*time, and times, and half a time,*" is no doubt chosen for some reason; perhaps to indicate that events are spoken of which do belong to a definite period, but which have a meaning and significance that stretches into other periods. But the period itself would seem to be identical with the 1260 days; the flight into the wilderness in the sixth verse cannot

be distinguished from the one in the fourteenth. What is said further about it is, that the woman is borne into her hiding place on the wings of a great eagle. *The* great eagle would be more literal: one reading is, the two wings of the great eagle. The ordinary emblem of the conquering city as well as the usage of the Apocalypse justifies us in assuming Rome to be the protectress in this instance. The eagle which was about to descend on the Jerusalem carcass rescued the witnesses for mankind—for the redemption of both Jew and Gentile—from the oppressions of the Jewish sects, as well as from their own false position in the midst of those sects. The dwelling in the wilderness appears to imply a suspension of all visible ordinances, of all outward fellowship. It was a necessary transition; a period in which the Church was to know herself before she entered upon her new vocation as the herald of a Divine kingdom to the imperial world. But there were dangers besetting her in the solitude.

IX. *"And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth."*

Jerusalem had been a hot-bed of sects or heresies. We think we exhaust the description of them when we speak of Pharisees, Sadducees, and perhaps Essenes. There must have been many more within these great political divisions, many outside of them. The Samaritans constituted another element; they had been always more prone than their neighbours to spiritual impostures; less tied down by orthodox formalities. The Judaism of Alexandria standing in close affinity with the Gentile philosophy, was rich in all conceptions

and imaginations. These turned especially upon the nature of the Divine Word who had spoken to the fathers; upon the relation in which He would stand to the Messiah that was to come; upon the offices and powers of Angels; upon their relations to God and men. What waters were these for the Church to float in after she was loosed from her old moorings! All simple faith, in a time when faith was most needed, must have been threatened, if not lost in them. But there was a merciful deliverance from this evil then, as there has been since. The Apostle's words very strikingly indicate it. The arguments of doctors go very little way in settling controversies; generally increase them, and add to the perplexities of those who are suffering from them. But the earth swallows them up. They may be exceedingly sublime, heavenly speculations; who knows? But they do not meet the daily necessities, business, sufferings of earth. And after all, what we ask for is that which will do this. Opinions with the clearest warrants of antiquity, with the finest gloss of novelty, must be brought to this test. What can they do for us? You say they are very probable: there is great evidence for them. No doubt; but I want something that I can rest upon; not something that is very likely, but something that is. Thanks to the good honest earth, which in due time sucks up all watery notions, and only leaves that which has proved itself to be substantial.

X. *“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*

Good reason the dragon had for wrath. He had trusted the earth as his friend, and it had proved his

foe. The plain solid work and the hard suffering which he thought would make men forget the Divine kingdom have really obliged them to break through the mists which were hiding the Divine kingdom from them. Other means than these must be tried. What means the next vision will tell us. But that we may know why they are used, what the dragon seeks to destroy, this great simple lesson is left with us which we may all lay to heart. The battle is not with those who hold some system which they call Christianity. It is with those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ—with those who hold fast the commandment that bids them love God with their hearts and souls and strength, and their neighbours as themselves—with those who hold fast the testimony of Jesus Christ, that God who commands us to love Him, has first loved us, and has given His Son for us all, and has justified and glorified that Son as our Mediator and Advocate at His right hand, and has sent His Spirit of Love to form us after His image. With these the Spirit of Evil fought in the old time, fights now, and will fight till he or they be vanquished. We have declared this day at God's altar that we are engaged in that strife, that we have failed in it, that there is only one strength which can enable us to prevail in it. And He has said to us this day: You may be more than conquerors through the might of Him who loved you. By the blood of the Lamb the weakest of you may overcome.

## LECTURE XIII.

### THE DRAGON AND THE TWO BEASTS.

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads, as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had



power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.—REV. xiii.

I. THERE is something picturesque in the form which this vision assumes, if we retain the reading of the first word which our own translators have adopted. The prophet is transported to the shore of his little island; as he looks upon the waters, this ugly creature rises out of them.

But there is another reading of more authority and more consistent with the general scope of the vision. The third person is substituted for the first. It is the dragon, not the prophet, who stands by the sea-shore. The beast which is seen to rise out of it is the earthly counterpart of himself. The sea will then, like the beast, have an emblematical force. Symbol and fact will be less confused.

I have said that the beast is the earthly counterpart of the dragon; that is the first point to remember in determining what this beast is. The dragon is emphatically a spiritual power; the self-willed power, the destructive power. He is cast out of heaven; he can no longer blacken the image of Him that sits on the throne to those that dwell there; to those who see the Man-child at the right hand of that throne. But he can wage war against that Man-child upon earth; he can

set up a rival dominion to His. Next, it should be recollected that such a rival dominion had, according to the Bible, existed in all ages. This final book of the Bible contemplates it at a particular crisis, when it had reached its full development.

The language of the last chapter, taken literally, compels us to think of the actual birth of Christ into the world as in some sense the commencement of the crisis. Yet it fixes a time of forty-two months, or a thousand two hundred and sixty days, as one in which the battle was at its climax, the decision of it at hand. The notion of a wild beast, who is the counterfeit of a dragon, seems to demand—has been thought by almost all interpreters to demand—a fulfilment in some person who should be the complete embodiment of an evil principle. To reconcile these different conditions, to find something that shall answer to them all, is the problem. Other conditions too must be satisfied. There is a description of this beast in the seventeenth chapter, which no conclusions we deduce from this ought to contradict. I believe it would be out of place to speak of that description here. It is mixed up with some topics of which at present we can take no notice. When we reach it in due course, we may consider how far it fits in with the interpretation I am about to give.

Seeing that the establishment of the Roman military despotism after the battle of Actium nearly synchronises with the birth of the Son of David; seeing that that despotism, after passing through its different stages of development in Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, was subjected to its great trial-day in the three turbulent reigns that followed, and came forth in its form of consummate brutality

in the person of Vitellius; I take this to be the wild beast in which the dragon saw his own image reflected. The prophet beholds it first in that mild form which it wore when Octavius rose from the triumvir into the patron of arts, the preserver of order, the object of poetical adulation; when all the names and forms of the Republic (as the great historian observes) were so skilfully preserved to hide the tyranny which lay beneath them: then, when that tyranny had cast aside its veils and came forth as the mere expression of the will of the soldiery, having no support but that which it derived from their arms. Because this beast is represented as having a continuous existence throughout these reigns, he appears with seven heads. Why with seven and not rather eight, we are to learn hereafter. The ten horns are, I apprehend, the legions in the different provinces. The real royalty is in them: the beast is sustained in his own power only by them. But yet he has another power distinct from theirs. On each one of the heads, upon that of the first and every succeeding one to the last, was the name of *Blasphemy*. Octavius, in becoming an emperor, becomes a god. A poet so temperate and so wise, with so much of the older Italian spirit, as Virgil, would not have bestowed on him the title in a mere fit of exaggerated gratitude, if there had been anything shocking to his countrymen in it, if they had not accepted it as the natural and necessary meaning of his elevation to be the ruler of the world. In no case is the remark more applicable, that "words are things." The name blended itself with all legal forms, mingled itself in all popular writings. The general of armies was in very deed the god to whom the Capitoline Jove did homage. He

protected the city, which the old object of republican worship had been unable to protect. He was to take care of the worship of the gods; they were to return his protection, and uphold his throne. But to all intents and purposes he was their master, not they his.

Out of that great sea of troubles, the civil wars which had followed the death of Cæsar and those in which Antony and Augustus had defied each other, this beast arose. To say that there had been nothing like it in the earlier world, would be to contradict all history, and sacred history the most. Every military empire had united these qualities. In every one the god and the beast had been mingled, in every one the beast at last proved itself triumphant. It would be as false to say that there was to be no similar manifestation in the ages to come. Perhaps every one of those ages might have such a manifestation, every one might with its own variations repeat this story. But here was the great consummation of the efforts at universal empire in the old world; here was the pattern of all that would be made in the new. Let no one suppose that he confutes this representation of it by producing evidence that it was inevitable; that the Republic could not have lasted without a head; that the experiment of Brutus, and those who dreamed of preserving the old order, necessarily began in an outrage upon order, and ended in the exchange of a noble for vulgar tyranny. All this may be admitted, and is quite consistent with the vision. The beast was the natural product of previous evils. He was not less evil for that.

II. "*And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his*

*mouth was as the mouth of a lion ; and the dragon gave him his power, and seat, and his great authority."*

A despotism spotted with forms of law and freedom ; resting on the rough and wild passions of a mob ; yet always speaking through its soldiers ; answers to these different outward appearances of the beast ; its inward heart is that of the dragon.

If the purpose of the dragon is to destroy the government of the Man-child, here is the government which he opposes to it ; here is his image of a throne that is above all thrones, and of an unlimited and universal sway.

III. "*And I saw one of the heads as if it were wounded to death, and the deadly wound was healed : and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power to the beast : and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast ? who is able to make war with him ?*"

A vivid description surely of the empire after the death of any one of its successive tyrants, but specially after the death of Nero. Then the beast seemed as it were wounded to death. A power to the malignity of which there appeared no limit, and which had made itself felt in every province, in every household, had actually fallen. Could such a tyranny ever rise again ? Had not the world burst its fetters once for all ? But "*the deadly wound was healed.*" The beast was not really gone, only one of the forms in which its nature had been for a while exhibited. Another monster was ready to take the place of the old ; another, in some respects a more unqualified manifestation of brutality, a more complete incarnation of the devilish. What was the effect ? "*All the world wondered after the beast.*" The tyranny in its vilest form is accepted as the regular, appointed

condition of things; yes, and it becomes an object of admiration. Not only the neck has become used to the collar. The souls of men have become used to it; have learnt to love it; are fashioned in accordance with it. "*And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast.*" They believe in the omnipotence of evil; they rejoice in it, they do homage to it, and to it alone. But evil in its essence is too rare and subtle a thing for their ordinary habitual service. They like it best in its concrete, earthly form. They "*worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?*" Can you not hear the words coming across all these centuries from the lips of two Roman youths talking with each other, as they lounge together in the Forum? They had noble thoughts once; they had heard of the deeds of their fathers; they had dreamed that there might be some possible good for their age. But they have become sottish, licentious, gamblers. And one more gigantically sottish, licentious, gambling than themselves has become their ideal of what is desirable and possible. Who is like to him? who can make war with him? These two youths fairly represent the age on which they have fallen. There is no originality in them. They think what every one else thinks. Their private opinion is the public opinion of the city and of the world.

But this wild beast, though he assumes from time to time the form of a particular man, and at last finds one in which there is little of the human left, must yet be contemplated mainly as representing mere force, especially the force of a turbulent army, conscious that it may confer the purple on whomsoever it will. So I explain the next verse.

IV. "*And there was given unto him a mouth speaking*



*great things and blasphemies ; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them ; and power was given unto him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."* The forty and two months here, as elsewhere, denote, I apprehend, the whole of that time of lawlessness which preceded the accession of Vespasian and the restoration of a regular government. During that time the sufferings of all provinces in the empire from an army which the aged hand of Galba was in vain striving to restrain, which mocked the effeminacy of Otho, which found only encouragement from the vileness of his successor, must have been utterly intolerable. The blasphemy against God, and His name, and His tabernacle, was provoked and aggravated, no doubt, by the conviction that the Jews who had talked about an invisible God, were at once the worst of all people, and were doomed to extinction. Yet, I understand their blasphemies to be against all right and order, not specially against that witness for it which was borne by one class of men or another. Their victory over the saints may mean, that whenever they met with a man who had any reverence for right, there they recognised an enemy, one who was to be put down—not by any processes of law—rather by summary execution. And to this desperate military violence and tyranny, which was the proper outcome and result of the despotism—though it had really no despot, only a head chosen to be its instrument—were all kindreds, and tongues, and nations for a while surrendered.

V. "*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship*

*him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."* It is not said that all should worship this beast of mere power, that all should believe in the prevalence and omnipotence of evil, who did not belong to the Christian community. Probably very many who belonged to that community did join in that general, that all but universal worship; did with their hearts, if not with their tongues, subscribe to the creed, that the dragon was the supreme lord. Only those who, whatever name they might have, however little known to each other, were known to God as confessing in their hearts a self-sacrificing King to be the highest King—only those who revered a Prince of Life, and not a destroyer—could resist the temptation to acknowledge that as supreme which to all appearance was proving itself supreme. Their names are said to be written in the book of the Lamb that is slain. Whether we suppose the prophet to say that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world, or that their names had been written in the book from the foundation of the world, the lesson will be the same. An eternal Deliverer is the only refuge from this great world-tyranny. A faith would be of no avail which did not look before and after, and connect itself with mankind. There was need to contemplate a Lamb who had always been offering himself up, who had come into the world to do that which it was His nature and His Father's will that He should do; otherwise there was no sufficient counterpoise against the overwhelming pressure of present wickedness, no sufficient assurance that it might not be permanent. There is no necessity to ask who were or were not armed with this protection. Thank God the book of life is the

Lamb's, and is not open to the inspection or correction of any man or any Church.

VI. *"If any man have an ear,"* the prophet goes on, *"let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity ; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."*

A most needful recollection for that time, and for all time since, worthy to be introduced with that solemn preparation by which our Lord, in the days of His flesh, was wont to bespeak attention to His own words. Hear, suffering men ! This dark, devilish tyranny seems as if it were destined to be immortal. It has been growing worse and worse. Each change of masters has aggravated it. Division of masters appears to be the worst state of all. You do not know with whom to ally yourselves. The success of each party only promises you fresh misery. Wait, I say ; wait ; join yourselves to no party ; enter into no conspiracies. If you do, you involve yourselves in their doom. For there is an eternal law which this beast cannot set at naught, though he fancies that he can. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity ; for a Redeemer, not a maker of slaves, is Lord of all. He that killeth with the sword shall be killed with the sword ; for there is a Judge who laughs at men's might, and who will show how weak it is before Him. This faith you may hold fast, for the Lamb that was slain held it fast while He was upon earth. This may be your patience, for it was His. It went with Him through death ; and now He is far above all principalities and powers and every name that is named here and in all other worlds.

VII. *"And I beheld another beast coming out of*

*the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.*" A form apparently quite unlike the other. He is very soft and gentle. Horns he has, but they are not meant to gore. He does not burst out of the stormy sea; he is born of no civil commotion. He rises gradually out of the earth; he is the natural product of men's thoughts; he sympathises with their weaknesses. And yet, when he begins to speak, it is as a dragon. Terrible threats go forth from him. This lamb-like creature desires to inspire fear just as much as the other.

What is he? That which sustained the imperial tyranny of Rome was the religion of Rome. With that religion in the old republican days had been mixed many Divine elements: the acknowledgment of fatherly authority; of sacred law; of a righteous government in the midst of the city. Always there had been a tendency to turn these merely to the account of the politician. The augurs were to be consulted: partly to know the mind of the gods; partly that the people might suppose that it was known. Sacrifices were offered: partly to confess things that had been wrong, and to proclaim the dominion of right; partly to try if wrong could not be made right by compensation; partly to persuade the people that wrong had been made right. There was this mixture of faith and unbelief, of truth and lies. It could not go on. The civil wars expelled most of the faith; made the lies more tolerable and more necessary. The empire needed a religion that should be entirely adapted to its purposes. Then rose this beast out of a darkened earth, to meet the natural fears of men and their bewildered conceptions of the unseen; holding out fair promises and terrible prognostics; the lamb and the dragon in

one, ready to do for the tyrant whatever he could not do for himself.

VIII. *"And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live."*

What I said of the former beast applies to this. He did not appear first in the Roman world. In Egypt, in Chaldæa, in every country where arbitrary rule prevailed, there did some form of false worship, some miracle-working enchanter or soothsayer arise to sustain that arbitrary rule with invisible tricks and terrors, to fashion the minds of the subjects into conformity with it. Whenever in later ages the one beast has risen out of the sea and asked the homage of nations, wearied with previous seditions and conflicts, the other has risen out of the earth to secure that homage for it by a similar assumption of the lamb-like character, by a similar use of the dragon's art and the dragon's fury. But the prophet gives us a striking illustration of the whole subject by fixing on that particular moment in the history when the first beast had received the wound by the sword and yet lived. Apparently the imperial tyranny had been smitten by its own instrument. The sword had turned against it. Why, then, did it not die? There was another influence at work which would not suffer it to die. A corrupted religion

had been so teaching men to reverence mere power, had been so fixing the image of that power in their hearts, had been so possessing and occupying all the avenues through which the thought of any other kind of power could have entered in, that even when it had been crushed by its own proper masters, it started again into fresh life. This is what we are told in the fifteenth verse.

IX. *“And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.”*

A fearful power ! but one which is given from time to time to those who direct the spiritual and moral forces of a land. When some dark form of tyranny has fallen, by the weight of its own crimes, by the act of its own accomplices, they can and do reanimate it. The sense of the invisible is mighty in all men—mighty in the wrongdoers, if it takes only the form of dread of what may be coming. If those who profess to commune with the invisible world, instead of arousing the conscience of men to a horror and hatred of lies, fill it only with fresh lies—playing with its hopes and its terrors, and turning both alike to evil—they may restore for a little while the worst form of brutal power, they may help to destroy all that it hates, all who will not bow before it. This is the reason.

X. *“And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads : and that no man might buy or sell save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

The words “*he causeth*” clearly ascribe this operation to the *second* beast. If it had been the first, we



might imagine that some outward mark or sign was meant; for that beast deals with the visible and outward. But this one stamps an image on the souls of men; this writes a name on all their inward thoughts, which afterwards expresses itself in their common daily acts. Accepting these words in this sense, I know none which are so fearful and none which are confirmed by such undoubted warrants of experience. Men fancy, when they read and talk of some great tyrant-power which has established itself in their country or their age, that they are reading and talking of something which is far off from them. They can comment upon it, measure its effects, calculate the chances of its continuance or of its fall. If any complain of it as bad in its origin or immoral in its practices, wise persons will whisper, "But it does not hurt you. You can buy and sell happily under the shadow of it. Your gains are not seriously lessened. You incur no great risks of loss." And all the time these wise persons are not aware that they themselves, as well as those with whom they are conversing, have received the mark of this power on their foreheads and their right hands; that the image of it is graven in their hearts; that they are shewing in these very discourses of theirs that they bear the name and character of that which they are excusing. This vision refers, as I have said often, to a moment when the *effects* of principles were no longer kept down by any formal or legal restraints. And then that became apparent which was not apparent before. It was seen that men follow, admire, worship that which corresponds to some image that is *within* them. It would not have come forth in palpable form in one man, if hundreds of thousands—if the great majority of the society—

had not received the impression. It becomes deeper and darker with every fresh act of service and adoration. It is not the wit or wisdom of the ruler which holds his subjects in fetters. He may have parted with his wit or wisdom, and they with theirs. But the fetters will remain ; for they are as he is. They bear his name about with them. The God which he obeys is the God which they obey. What he does on a larger scale, each of them does or tries to do in his own little sphere. There is no act of barter which they transact with each other that does not shew forth the spirit with which he is governing kindreds and tongues and nations. For men are bound together in a fellowship if they become ever so resolutely and savagely selfish. They must have a common name, a common image, whether they like it or not. It may be the name of a Father, or of a Dragon ; it may be the image of a Christ or of an anti-Christ. But at last, by the laws of the universe, one or other will make itself manifest, in the little and the great, in the rich and the poor, in the free and in the bondmen.

XI. Besides the mark and the name, there is an allusion at the end of this passage to the number of *the name*. We ask what that means. The concluding verse of this chapter gives the answer.

*“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast ; for it is the number of a man ; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”* Acting in obedience to this command, interpreters who thought they had understanding, have set to work with great diligence to count this number. As it is said to be the number of a man, their object has been to find what man is likely to be pointed at ; then to ascertain whether by any means his name can be made to square

with the figure six hundred and sixty-six. The traditional process for arriving at satisfaction on this point, is to take the numerical values of the Greek letters composing the name on which the experiment is made, and to add them up. By the application of this method—assisted occasionally by the variation of a letter, or the interpolation of an iota subscript when it is found necessary—I cannot say how many an eminent man in one age or another has been demonstrated to be the beast of which St. John speaks. It is rash, I know, to break through a rubric of interpretation which has so long a prescription in its favour; but I cannot think that the success of this scheme obliges us to choose one out of the multitude of names which different commentators have suggested, to the necessary rejection of the rest, or warrants us in venturing any new guess in the same direction. As I have hinted that Vitellius was that eighth head of the Roman empire who appeared to restore all the brutality of Nero's dynasty, I might try whether his name, translated into Greek letters, might not by some skill in counting, fulfil the required conditions. But I fancy I should be overlooking other conditions as necessary to be considered, if I took this course. I never heard that the name of Vitellius, or any other name, was ordered to be marked on the right hands or the foreheads of the inhabitants of the Roman empire, or that no one might buy or sell who did not bear it. Amongst the various acts of reckless and cruel tyranny recorded of Roman emperors or their successors, no hint of this strange and wanton exercise of power, I believe, has been preserved. But if we will have an actual word, reduced first into letters, then into numbers, we must adhere to the text in these particulars; we cannot be material one moment, spiritual the next.

It is well, I think, to dismiss these trials once for all, even if we are compelled to leave the problem altogether unsolved. If I venture to make one more attempt at a solution, I am far from saying it is satisfactory ; I shall rejoice to exchange it for any simpler one that hereafter may be discovered. At least, it will not clash with what I have said already respecting the mark and the name. These I believe to have been stamped in no material letters, then or at any other time. The name or character of the great tyrant of any age, I still assume to be imaged in those who have raised him to his bad eminence, and who sustain him in it.

In counting the number of this name, I cannot help noticing how continually the number *seven* occurs in this book, and what a meaning is always attached to it. Whether the prophet speaks of the seven candlesticks, the seven Spirits of God, the seven eyes, or the seven horns of the lamb, the idea which is presented to us is that of perfect unity involving perfect distinctness. To the mind of a Jew—why should we not say to the mind of an Englishman?—the week is the simplest, and yet the profoundest illustration of this unity : the six days and the one day making the complete whole : the day of rest giving the interpretation, and purpose, and harmony to the others ; connecting the order of times and the life of man, with the Being who made all things, and made man in His own image.

Now suppose we found the number *six* used to denote that beast who embodies the antichristian principle—who is at the head of the kingdom which is opposed to the kingdom of God—we should at once, I think, compare it with this perfect number, and should conclude that it was the symbol of a society, of which

man, not God, was the head, a society in which there would be a number of atoms without a centre, work without a sabbath. Suppose, then, we have not one six, but a succession of sixes, six in units, six in tens, six in hundreds, may not the intention be the same? It is as if he had said, "Here is the number which denotes what is divided, in opposition to what is united. Repeat this number as often as you will, you do not arrive at unity. You have lost the secret of unity, the spiritual bond; no material accumulations will be a substitute for it. How to find a unity which does not depend upon the repetition of numbers; how to bind the toil of the six days with the rest which completes it, and gives it its meaning: this you may learn if you will behold the next vision; if you will look at those who are surrounding, not a wild beast, but a lamb, who have not the name of a destroyer, but the name of their Father written on their foreheads."

## LECTURE XIV.

### THE LAMB AND HIS FOLLOWERS.

(PREACHED ON WHITSUNDAY.)

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder : and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps : and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders : and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women ; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of God. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him ; for the hour of his judgment is come : and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation ; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb : and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever :



and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints : here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth : Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them.—REV. xiv. 1-14.

I. THIS vision recalls the one in the seventh chapter. When the angels were going forth with their trumpets to prepare for the fall of the accursed city, another angel was seen sealing twelve thousand of every tribe of Israel with the seal of the living God. The names of the tribes which were so carefully and formally enumerated there, do not appear again here. But the total number of the sealed is the same. The place Mount Sion connects them with the chosen people. There are, however, two new circumstances : these one hundred and forty-four thousand are about the Lamb, and they are signed with their Father's name. I would especially call your attention to the resemblance between these visions, and to the difference between them, on this day. Whitsuntide, it seems to me, throws a clear light upon the whole subject, and in turn receives a light from the Apocalypse.

(1.) The Feast of Pentecost was strictly a *Jewish* feast, though it was a thanksgiving for the gifts of the common earth. Those who came to it recognised Jerusalem as their centre. The Apostles at this Pentecost spoke to them of a Son of David, and of David himself. The wonder which struck all ears and hearts, was that Galileans should be able to hold converse with Jews dwelling in all the different heathen cities, respecting the works of the God of Abraham. Those who received the Spirit felt that they were no longer

a divided people, scattered among the heathen, but a family which no separation of place could put asunder. They were indeed children of Abraham, because they were children of God. Though they might be only a remnant of Israel, though the majority of their countrymen might continue to call Him whom they revered as a Divine King a malefactor and blasphemer, they represented a united Israel. The nation which the sects were destroying lived in them.

(2.) And yet the ascended King was shewn to be the King of the Jews, because He had conquered the death which held all men captive, because He could not stay in one earthly dwelling-place. He must then be the King of men. However slow the Apostles might be in learning that they were to proclaim Him in that character, however important it was that there should be a period during which they were realising their position as Jews, and shewing their countrymen what was implied in that position, it was inevitable that events would break down the barriers which they could not break down. Their fellowship was essentially a human fellowship.

(3.) It was human because it was Divine. Before Christ left them He had said, "I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God." And now He sent them the promise of this Father. That promise He had Himself interpreted to be the gift of another Comforter, who should abide with them for ever, a Spirit of Truth; One who should teach them of Him and of His Father. The new name with which they were sealed was a name which Gentiles, as much as Jews, had been feeling after. The awful words, "The Lord thy God is One Lord," seemed to put all those who had been associating human thoughts and feelings

with God, at an immeasurable distance. Now, when the highest manifestation of the glory of God was in One who had taken flesh and become man; now, when a Spirit had been given who could teach them most to magnify God by most magnifying His image; now the hope of the Greek might be fulfilled as much as that of the Israelite: the kingdom of heaven could embrace both. The unity of God repelled none, attracted all.

(4.) These sealed members of the different tribes are now gathered on Mount Sion, around the Lamb. The place indicates that they represent the continuity of the Jewish family. But the Lamb who bore the sins of the world indicates that they are no longer members of tribes, that their centre is no longer in Jerusalem. The insect has passed through its stages of egg, and caterpillar, and chrysalis. It has become winged. It can soar to heaven, or light upon any leaf or flower of earth. The chosen nation has expanded into the Church of the universe. It is a witness that men are not fatherless, are not servants of a beast. It declares them to be redeemed and united in a living and glorified Head.

Perhaps you say that the next words contradict this assertion. Let us consider them.

II. *“And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and before the elders; and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he*

*goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits to God and the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of God."*

Now I shall be told that nothing here is said about a redemption of the world ; much about a redemption *from* the world. These followers of the Lamb stand out in broad contrast to all by whom they are surrounded. Their great blessing is that the habits of the world are not their habits. Their song cannot be learnt or understood by any but themselves. The world is lying in wickedness, worshipping a beast and his image ; they are faultless.

These remarks are obvious and true. What inferences should be deduced from them ? Many have been deduced. " Christians are redeemed from the earth. What can that signify, but that the earth is a vile, unclean thing, with which they have nothing to do ? The habits of Christians are not to be the habits of the world. What can that signify but that they should keep themselves as much as possible to themselves, that they should preserve the purity and virginity of their souls by not mixing with those who are corrupted ? They have songs of their own ; what can that signify but that God has given them an inheritance from which men generally are shut out ? " In later times these conclusions have appeared to many religious men so inevitable, that in all countries of Christendom, Protestant as well as Romish, they have been made the groundwork of different systems of action ; one sect or one order after another has arisen to proclaim them, to denounce former orders and sects for neglecting them, to illustrate them in their own practice.

To the Christian society shortly after the day of

Pentecost, maxims very unlike these presented themselves as inevitable, and became the foundation of their conduct. One of the first records of their life is this, that they ate their meat with joy and singleness of heart. This was a new thing to them. Part of the song they had learnt was a thanksgiving for the earth and its gifts, which they had before received with dulness and indifference. But was not separation from other men and suspicion of other men characteristic of them after they had received their baptism? If it had been, that would have been no special distinction from the world in which they had dwelt. Each of the Jewish sects cultivated this separation, cherished this suspicion; the most popular sect acquired its religious reputation by the distance at which it kept those who did not accept its decrees. The Christians would at once have been recognised as proving their title to be a Nazarene sect, if they had followed this precedent. They could not follow it, because the principle of their profession was that they should follow the Lamb whithersoever He went. He had not gone in this direction at all. He had solemnly taken another course. He had incurred the wrath of the Pharisees by eschewing what seemed to them incontrovertible dogmas respecting the treatment of their fellow-creatures—by going to sinners and eating with them. If His disciples, after His ascension, were to purge themselves from the old leaven, the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they must above all things seek to purge themselves of the leaven of exclusiveness; no ingredient had adulterated the pure Paschal bread so much as that.

But if they got rid of this leaven, how could they become a pure lump wholly consecrated to God?

Only while they confessed that in themselves individually dwelt no good thing—nothing which could raise them above the lowest publican or harlot or heathen in the world; only while they confessed that all their purity was in that Lamb who had taken them into fellowship with Himself, and had written His Father's name on their foreheads; only while they confessed that in Him God looked upon them as faultless, utterly undefiled; that fault and corruption began when they forgot their relation to Him, when they separated themselves from each other, when they pursued separate ways and interests of their own. What, then, was their *redemption from among men*? The redemption from their self-interests, from their self-worship; the privilege of confessing the Son of Man who had redeemed them and all mankind; the privilege of belonging in very deed to a human kind; not of being, like the worshippers of the beast, utterly inhuman. I would not change one word or letter of this passage. I demand that it should be construed in the most strict way in which it can be construed. I demand that the feeble subterfuges and evasions which would make "faultless" an equivalent for "not very faulty"—"undefiled," for "pure so far as is compatible with human infirmity"—should be dismissed as irreverent and dishonest. And then I am sure this passage will be the reconciliation of a multitude of others in which readers discover an opposition, using one to qualify the other till both become equally empty of meaning; I am sure it will be seen that the more Christians are free from the corruptions of their age, the less will they dare to limit the grace of God; that the more they regard themselves as firstfruits to God and the Lamb, the more will they believe the universe



has been offered and sacrificed to God in its High Priest, and that He will assert His right to it, let who will dispute that right.

This then, I believe, is the subject of that song which began in heaven, and was echoed upon earth, which was sung before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders; which was "*as it were new*;" not actually new, not without preludes in former days, not different in spirit from any of those which had risen from the hearts and lips of old prophets when they were glorifying God under the tyranny of some brute power, and amid the sins and degeneracy of their countrymen; but new, inasmuch as it was the fulfilment of all these older songs; new, inasmuch as it celebrated the actual atonement of heaven and earth which they had only anticipated; new, inasmuch as the brute power of this day was more distinctly and formally antichristian than any of those could be which had preceded the Incarnation.

III. "*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people; saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters.*" This and the other messages which follow, are strictly messages from heaven to earth. The first implicitly contains the rest. It is called an everlasting Gospel; good news concerning an everlasting God; good news to all His creatures everywhere. It is that Gospel which Saul of Tarsus, the Hebrew of the Hebrews, bore to the idolaters of Greece and Asia, and felt in bearing it that he was strictly fulfilling his functions as a child of Abraham.

The Jew lifted up his voice and said to the world, "You who have been worshipping things in heaven, and earth, and in the sea, and in the fountains of waters, you who have been bowing to gods in nature and of nature, you who have been making gods in your own image, in the likeness of your good and evil desires, of your just and unjust notions, of your pure and lustful impulses; fear *the* God who has made all things in heaven, and earth, and the sea; fear Him who has made man in His own image; for He has revealed His true image to men; He has revealed the standard of righteousness; the Judge who condemns all unrighteousness; the Redeemer from all unrighteousness." Do you think it is not a Gospel because it begins with the word "Fear," or because it speaks of judgment? I believe no Gospel can satisfy men except this. They want to know whom they should fear. They must fear an evil being if they do not fear a good Being. They cannot trust one whom they do not reverence. Take away awe; and He whom you worship shrinks again to your own dimensions. The misery of men had been that they had made a God in their own likeness. To have Him revealed to them as infinitely above them, as stooping to them, was the overthrow of the superstition that had made them cowards and slaves. And the deliverance would be utterly incomplete if they might not believe that this righteous God was their Judge, the Judge of the whole earth, and that they might take refuge in Him from the false judgments of all men, and most chiefly from their own, and from themselves.

IV. "*And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she*

*made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornications."*

The Babel or Babylonian polity was contradictory of the Israelite polity. The ruler stood in no relation to his people; he was a ruler merely. The gods to whom he did homage were *powers*, different and discordant powers; they were to be worshipped and propitiated as the supporters of his government; they cared nothing for those who worshipped and propitiated them. The God of Israel was declared to be the King and Husband of His people. The kings who reigned in His name were to care for the people as a husband cares for his wife. When the nation fell, as it was continually falling, into idolatry, this was said to be an act of fornication or adultery, the wife revolting from her real Lord. That language was applicable to the chosen people. It could now be applied to the world at large. The Angel proclaims that it does not now belong to the world. The Husband of the race has appeared; all idolatry is fornication or adultery. Men can be told that they are spiritual beings, united to a spiritual Lord, and that in giving themselves to fleshly and visible things they are forsaking their lawful state; they are yielding themselves to seducers. This was involved in the revelation of the Son of Man. And therefore there was involved in it the downfall of the system of idolatry—of the whole Babel polity. Widely as it had spread, mighty and subtle as were its influences over every tribe and nation—the day when the Man-child was born, when the true Head of man, the true bond between heaven and earth was discovered, that was the day of its doom. Already, in the Roman empire, there were signs how the system was cracking

and falling to pieces. It could not sustain the tyranny which depended upon it; the tyranny could not sustain it. The cry, "It is fallen! it is fallen!" would be illustrated in that very age by the convulsion which was shaking earth and heaven, the seat of the empire and the seats of the gods. And the proclamation was not weaker but stronger, because in that convulsion the city which had borne witness against the Babel idolatry was itself to perish. For it had admitted the Babel principle into its very heart. Jerusalem had become emphatically the city of confusion. It had aspired to make for itself a name, and had forgotten the name of its God. It had thought that its towers were high and reached to heaven; but they were built of brick instead of stone; they were cemented with slime instead of mortar. The jabber of its sects showed that God had come down to confound its pride. It had no tongue which was intelligible to itself; how could it render itself intelligible to the world? The Church which the Spirit had entrusted with power to speak to men of different tribes, in their own tongues, of the wonderful works of God, could not but see that the fall of Jerusalem was one sign among many that the thrones of all false gods were to be cast down:

"They feel from Juda's land  
The dreaded Infant's hand,  
The rays of Bethlehem blind their dusky eyen."

And this because that Infant came not to destroy, but to fulfil; to gather into one all the scattered beliefs and hopes of the world; to overthrow its lies by justifying its truths. We must not confound this voice with that which follows it, intimately as they are connected. The Babel society, considered in itself, is based upon the worship of a number of persons. But

these are always aiming at a mock unity. The beast, which was described in the last chapter, is that concentration of what is brutal in the others, that exclusion of what is human.

V. *“And the third angel followed, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”*

The voice of the angel sings utter perdition, torment, perpetual restlessness to those who carry in their hearts the image of the beast. Why? Because the eternal God has manifested His image to men; has claimed them as formed in that image; has promised His Spirit to write His name on their hearts. The worship of the beast is the degradation of spiritual beings into beasts, a degradation which involves an anguish that only spirits can know; a sense of something lost; endless discontent with that which has been exchanged for it; the undying worm of the conscience; the envy and hatred possessing and governing creatures formed for fellowship and love. Some dream of this misery may be traced in the lamentations of the companions of Ulysses when they had tasted the cup of Circe, and had been transformed by her wand. The feeling of the exile will be always saddest in proportion to the beauty of the home from which he has wandered. The intellectual Greek had a



perception of the meanness of swinish existence which the savage could not have. It is inevitable, therefore, that the vision of a God of eternal goodness and loving-kindness which the Gospel presents should make the hell of solitude and selfishness profoundly and inconceivably dark. Such expressions as these, "*the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without measure ; "tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb ;*" "*the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever ;*" "*they have no rest day nor night ;*" may easily become mere figures of speech which the orator plays with at his pleasure ; which frighten the nerves for half an hour ; which fret but do not rouse the conscience ; which are expected and demanded by the lazy hearers as sounds that relieve the monotony of an ordinary discourse. For the Gospel of such an orator is not a Gospel of God ; but a Gospel about the way in which men may be delivered from God. He has no message concerning a kingdom of light which the incarnation and death of the Son of God has opened to mankind ; therefore his message concerning the kingdom of darkness speaks to nothing in the hearts and spirits of men ; only tingles or rattles in their ears. This angel's voice is charged with real thunder because it is essentially sweet and Divine. If the love of God were contracted in the very least degree, the horror of separation from that love, of devotion to lust and hatred, must be contracted in the same degree. If the power of the Divine love to raise men out of that abyss of horror were reduced by any time measures, the sense of what is implied in spiritual and eternal death, the dread of it, the force of those divinely chosen images which denote it, must be



reduced by the same measures. In easy times the opposition may not be very apparent; the Divine words and their counterfeits may be often exchanged for each other, and be taken to have the same value. In such times as those of which St. John speaks, when the beast's power and the Lamb's power are meeting each other face to face; when every one has to choose between them; when all apparent strength is on the side of evil; then do the words of the angel which proclaim that *it* is not omnipotent but utterly accursed come forth in their clearness and might. The beast with the lamblike countenance, whose business is to stamp the image of the beast with the dragon's horns on the hearts of men, may mingle eternal and temporal terrors in wild confusion, so crushing more effectually than in any other way the spirits of men under his ignominious yoke. The messenger of God knows in that day that he is to set forth, in straight and broad words, the spiritual and eternal perdition which is involved in the service of a false and cruel power, if so he may turn men to the Conqueror of that power; if so he may convince them that the Redeemer is stronger than the destroyer, and that there are no chains that the one can forge which the other cannot break.

VI. The words that follow are familiar to us out of their context. It is important that we should know them in their context.

*"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."*

What has the patience of the saints to do with that announcement respecting the worshippers of the beast which we heard just now? My brethren! to believe that the devil is not the lord of the world, that he cannot give the kingdoms of it to whom he will, is hard at all times, intensely hard in those times when evil and brute power has established its ascendancy, and the world is crying after it. Then it seems but the confession of an obvious fact to admit this dominion of the enemy of man. Nay, it will be asserted by some as a pious duty to hold this faith. "Christ is to reign hereafter; but at present the earth is given up to the dragon." I deem it impossible, while we think this, that we should not do some homage—yes, continual homage—to that power which we suppose is uppermost. And therefore this book teaches the deep and all-important lesson that the patience of the saints consists in believing steadfastly that message of the angel concerning the beast, and in *not* believing any whispers and suggestions of his respecting his authority. So doing they keep the commandment, which has said, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*" So doing they tread the path of Jesus, who did with this commandment resist the adversary when he said, "*All these will I give thee, and the glory of them, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*" He knew that to admit that lie—to confess that these kingdoms were in the hands of the evil one—*was* to fall down and worship him. He wanted no other homage. Christ might have the kingdoms hereafter, if He would grant them to be Satan's at that moment. He said, "*Get thee behind me.*" In His strength every one of His followers, in the darkest hour, when good appears most utterly defeated, is to say the same.

And to strengthen them to this effort, there comes another heavenly voice, saying, "*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth.*" Why *from henceforth*? Were not the dead always blessed which died in the Lord? If the words had a special reference to that time, may we dare to use them in our funeral service for any brother or sister, whose remains we commit to the earth now? I think the words did belong to that time; I think *from henceforth* had a sound of special comfort for those, who, if they judged by the sight of their eyes, must have concluded that the earth was not the Lord's. It reminded them that the earth is but part of the universe; that threescore years and ten do not settle the great questions which are debated here; that the Lord, who has gone into the grave and hell, has ascended on high, that He may open eternity to men. The voice says to those who are sinking under the spectacle which the world offers to them, "Yes! but now at this very moment men are passing into a region where the mists that obstruct our vision here do not dwell; where they shall know that not the beast, but the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." And so the words became retrospective and prospective likewise. "Know from henceforth that they who fell asleep before Christ came in the flesh, are about His throne. Know from henceforth that you are in the midst of an innumerable company of every kindred and nation, who are watching your fight, and helping you in it. Know henceforth that that company will gather fresh members from all the ages that are to come—in lands unknown to you will men that are trembling at the thought of death, learn to sink their own deaths in His who died for the world. Remember, henceforth, that the hard labours which you or they

may undergo in fighting with the beast in yourselves or in the world, are leading assuredly to a rest in God. Know from henceforth, that if you or they leave works which God has set you to do in this earth, poor and incomplete, these works will follow you, when you have passed through the veil. Know from henceforth, that whatever is begun, will be brought to its perfection; that new spheres of blessed toil will be opened to God's servants; that as they followed the Lamb under the pressure of mortality, they will follow Him now to fresh victories, till every enemy which has opposed Him, and tormented His creatures, shall be put under His feet."

## LECTURE XV.

### THE REAPING AND THE WINEPRESS.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap : for the time is come for thee to reap ; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth ; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire ; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth ; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.—REV. xiv.

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues ; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire : and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty : just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name ? for thou only art holy : for all nations shall come and worship before thee ; for thy judgments are made manifest. And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened : and the seven angels came

out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.—REV. xv.

DOES this vision also, I shall be asked, belong to the first century? Are we then to lose the fear and the hope which cleave in all our minds to the thought that the Son of Man will indeed come to judge the quick and the dead? Is there to be no future harvest of the earth? Is no angel to thrust in his sickle and reap it?

My brethren, it seems to me that the expectation of a judgment is far too weak in every one of us; that the preacher who could deepen it into a firm and abiding conviction, would be the greatest of all preachers; even as he who does anything to diminish what there is of it in any man, is to that extent most mischievous. I find that John the Baptist, that our Lord Himself, that every one of His Apostles, was a preacher of *judgment*, of a judgment nigh at hand, of one coming upon the generation of which they were speaking. I think it is because we have not taken their words literally enough, that we have been unable to speak in their spirit, to feel and make others feel that there is a judgment overhanging us, that the Son of Man will indeed appear in the glory of His Father, and that every one will have secrets of his heart, the deeds he has done, laid bare before him. No book, it seems to me, would bring this truth so home to us, as this book of the Apocalypse, if we read it simply. While I do not try to torture any of its words out of their obvious sense—while I accept them



as explaining the sense in which John the Baptist, and our Lord and His disciples uttered their words—I am forced to feel and confess that the judgment is set, and the books are open ; that nothing can be hid from the eyes of Him with whom we have to do ; that, every good and evil seed in every man and every society is ripening to its harvest ; that the fruit of the one must be gathered into its garner, the fruit of the other burnt up.

I. We have just heard the message, “ *Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them.*” I supposed these words to sound very cheerily in the ears of one who was looking out upon a world which was worshipping the beast and his image. It assured him that there was a region in which another worship prevailed, and that there was a passage from this region into that. Then he looks, “ *and behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*” The first thought of the prophet might be that the blessing of the dead consisted in this, that they left a world, not in which the Son of Man was not *recognised*, but one in which He was not *reigning*. This sight scatters that dark delusion. On a cloud that has been drawn up from earth, though the whiteness of it testifies of light and of heaven, he sees no strange form, but the form of Him who always claimed that human name to Himself, who in His birth, in His passion, in His resurrection, His ascension, had vindicated it as His. That the earth was passing through a fearful crisis was evident enough. Wise heathens saw it, and thought that the gods were busy in taking vengeance,

on men, and cared nothing for their safety or deliverance. To St. John the Saviour of men was revealed as Himself the reaper of the earth. He has won His crown; the Divine glory rests upon Him. But in His hand is the symbol that the work which is doing upon earth is His doing. It was *that* revelation which the exile in Patmos wanted. It is *that* revelation which we want. He did not need to be told that there was a consuming process going on; every one could perceive so much. But to learn who was directing that process, to learn that it was for the destruction of the destroyer, this was precious lore indeed. If we accepted it—if we interpreted by it the events which are passing in our age, and which will form the history of it for the ages to come, would not the lore be of some worth to us? On the white cloud sat the Son of Man then, on the white cloud He sits now. If the mists were scattered from our spirits, we should discern Him, and that would be an encouragement and a warning in our work, which nothing else could be.

II. *“And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the time is come for thee to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”* This voice issued from the inner temple; it expressed the Divine purpose and will. That purpose and will the Son of Man had been fulfilling before the worlds were. That purpose and will He fulfilled in the act of creation, when all things came forth at His word, and man at the head of all, and lo! the whole was very good. That purpose and will He fulfilled in His agony and cross. That purpose and will He fulfilled in His triumph over death, and space, and time. And now that purpose and will is to be fulfilled in an act of

judgment. All that He has wrought upon the earth for men, has not been in vain. The resistance to His work has not defeated it, as mortals might conclude. The end of the age is come. The results of the good and evil that have been working side by side are apparent. "*The harvest of the earth is ripe.*"

III. "*And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle, and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*"

The reaping of the earth indicates; I conceive, the gathering in of the fruits of all the Divine seed which had been scattered over the nations, and in the hearts of men. Nothing that had been effected in society by laws, institutions, family memorials, traditions, by the voice of prophets, and the deeds of patriots; nothing that had been effected for the growth and purification of the individual soul by the myriad influences of nature, by the voices of mothers, by the power of mutual affection, by sorrows and separations, by reconciliations and hopes, no devout wish that had ascended in prayers and sacrifices, having first been inspired by Him to whom it was offered, was to be lost. The Son of Man has watched it all, has laid it among His treasures; all has proceeded from Him, and will now be owned by Him. That this is true in respect

to each person, we shall be told hereafter. Now the words rather lead us to dwell on the great *human* results of all this Divine culture; those which are to survive in the age that is coming; those which are to give to that age its shape and character. If the reaping of the earth meant the destruction of the earth, it would of course be idle to speak of a new age as about to begin, when the old passed away. But reaping does not mean destruction in the ordinary discourse of men, nor in Holy Writ. And Holy Writ does speak of the end of an age, and of a better age that was to follow. And the very lesson which this passage teaches—and the whole Apocalypse teaches—is that God's fires are not for the ruin of the earth, which is the work of His hands, but for the ruin of those who have defiled it by the work of *their* hands.

This is the subject of the words which follow. Not only the earth is God's, but the fire. That is His minister. The message concerning it proceeds from the altar. It is to serve, as it has ever done, both for the kindling the sacrifice, and burning the offal. The vine of the earth here manifestly represents all that is *not* of God's planting, all the thoughts and deeds of blood which have sprung from the rebellious will of man, and which have made the earth drunk and foul. The grapes of this vine, like the corn that has grown from the Divine seed, are now fully ripe. When the corn is reaped, it may have many processes of threshing and winnowing to go through. The grapes are cast into the winepress. What kind of winepress it is, we shall be told more distinctly hereafter. But the indications here cannot be mistaken. A horrible conflict between opposing factions, forerunning the ruin of a city or an empire, looks at first only a reason for despair. To see

for a space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs nothing but blood reaching to the bridles of the horses—human creatures destroying each other, and the innocent animals perishing with them—is a sight to make an ordinary man weep; how much more a seer who believes that man was made in God's image, and who has proclaimed the doctrine that God is Love! Utterly appalling the sight would be, if the seer had *not* that faith to sustain him. Holding it, he cannot find in the darkest of such spectacles the slightest excuse for despondency. The wrath, and fury, and wickedness of men, which have been accumulating for centuries, have reached their consummation, have come to their great trial day. Now they are to spend and exhaust themselves. Now they are to come into contact with another power. The winepress cannot only be considered as one in which the grapes of the earth are crushed. It is the great winepress of *the wrath of God*. The wrath of love, the wrath of goodness, is to encounter the wrath of hatred and evil. It is to be proved on this earth and throughout the creation of God which is the mightier.

And so we are prepared for the words which have been somewhat inconveniently, I think, separated from these, and made the opening of another chapter.

IV. "*And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.*" Much discussion has been in the Christian Church about the time when these seven last plagues did begin, or are to begin, how long they are to last, whether we are experiencing one of them now. I cannot regret that such questions should have been stirred, because I am sure that some have been led by them to reflect upon the plagues



which were visiting themselves, their families, their country, or Christendom generally, and to ask, Whence came these, with what message are they charged? Those who have been used to receive one calamity or another with the thoughtlessness and stupidity to which we are all prone, may well be thankful if by any means through any interpreter of prophecy, through any ambition to interpret it for themselves, they are brought to believe that this or that event *may* have a Divine force in it, *may* be the sign and witness of the Divine government. For then will they not go on by degrees to say, "If this is true in one case, must it not be true in all? Dare I isolate any one of the transactions in which I myself have borne a part, or of which I have read, as affecting my country or mankind, and say: *This* I can attribute to the Lord of heaven and earth, but not *that*, or *that*; *this* deserves my earnest thought to penetrate its intention; *those* I may safely pass by?" I can imagine that the very uncertainty of these conjectures has led many serious persons into a truer habit of mind. They could not be sure that any plague might not answer the conditions of these Apocalyptic plagues; why then not act upon the conclusion that all had the same generic character, that not one lay out of the Divine orbit, that not one was an eccentric messenger, coming upon an errand of its own? But if any are tempted to a frivolous debating about the correspondences between particular visitations which occur in their own time, and those to which this passage refers, till they come to treat those in which they do not discover these resemblances as indifferent and profane; that atheistical opinion at once proves that they cannot have been sitting at the feet of the Apostle, that they cannot have been



profiting by his revelations. It is nothing to say, "Oh, but he speaks of seven *last* plagues; we want to know which *these* are." Surely he does. And that very word *last*, and the illustration of it in the expression, "*in them was filled up the wrath of God*," shows that they were like in kind to all that had gone before; that they denoted the winding-up of a period; of a period which had all along been subject to the Divine culture and discipline; not a single event of which could ever be contemplated by an Apostle except as the indication of a purpose of God, or of a struggle against that purpose. Assume, if you please, that there is to be a winding-up of *our* dispensation; believe, if you will, that it is at hand. But the more you hold this opinion, the more should you be afraid of resting anything upon conjecture; the more should you wish to be in a state of calm, steady, habitual preparation for that which is coming—not as a new or strange occurrence, but as the catastrophe of the Divine drama which every previous step in it has been foretelling.

V. The real lesson which we have to learn from that which we see, and from that which we read, and the comparison of one with the other, is set forth in the next three verses. "*And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy*

*judgments are made manifest."* There was a time when those who stood upon this sea of glass, and sang these songs, had wished for some firm footing for themselves; had liked to think that they at least were safe upon some raft or upon some spot of earth, though the world were whelmed in the waters, or burnt up in the fire. That craving has been taken from them. The ledges of earth have been carried away, the planks have floated out of their reach. Now they stand by faith in God alone. The sea is all they have to rest upon; they may drop in a moment into the fires. Their one security is that God will hold them up. They can trust themselves and the universe to Him. And that is their victory over the beast and his name and his mark and the number of his name. Self-seeking, and the distrust which accompanies self-seeking, these are his characteristics, these are the marks which he sets upon his followers. Hard and tremendous has been the battle with them. Every moment it has been renewed; every moment the tyrant is threatening them, and may again prevail. Their victory stands in their faith, not in themselves. They can trust God upon the sea of glass in the midst of the fire. They know that the sea is His, and that He made it; that this sea of glass is before His throne, and reflects His image. They know that the fire is His; that it proceeds from His altar; that it is the fire of love, and will consume what is hostile to love.

Therefore these men have the harps of God, and they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God. *"Moses said, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and the rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God,*

*and I will prepare him an habitation, my fathers' God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war : the Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea : his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea."* Here is the song of the old covenant, of the old world. It is the song of God's victory over the oppressor, of God's deliverance of the oppressed. It never can be obsolete as long as there are oppressors and oppressed in the creation. Woe to those who would take a single word out of it, who would try to make it more gentle to the wrongdoer, by making it less a witness for the sufferer.

But they also sing the song of the Lamb. *That* more than the other is a song of redemption. *That* more than the other is a song of judgment. Moses, the servant of God, declares the great and marvellous works of the Lord, how for ever and ever He wars against the tyrant, how for ever and ever He wars on behalf of the weak and the crushed. The Lamb of God, the perfect image of the Father, reveals not His works only, but His ways ; He shows Him forth as He is. The Lamb not only fights with the tyrant, but submits to the tyrant ; not only fights for the weak and the crushed, but becomes the most weak and crushed of all. He strips Himself of all power, that the eternal love of God may be seen through His emptiness. He clothes Himself with power that it may be seen that all the power of the universe is the power of love, and that they must beat down all which is contrary to it. With infinite delight and satisfaction, therefore, do those who have the harps of God contemplate His judgment. Redemption and judgment have become in their minds inseparable. All the plagues which are falling upon the earth are to glorify that Name

which alone is holy. All are for the good of the nations; for they will at last come and worship before Him; they will renounce the destroyer, and confess the deliverer.

VI. *“And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials, full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.”* I need scarcely point out to you with what fondness the Apostle lingers over the old names and the old symbols that have been so dear to him and to his fathers; how he speaks of the tabernacle of the testimony, thus bringing back all the recollections of the wilderness; of the temple of which there was to be no relic upon earth, of the pure and white linen, and of the golden girdles of those priests whose last days had been days of sin, and whose end had come. He can bear to part with them, because each has found its signification, each has been transfigured. The tabernacle of the testimony in heaven is now open. There is no longer a shadow of the Divine Presence; there is a full, clear, authentic testimony of what it is. The glory of God is revealed without a veil in the face of a Man. And so there is now an abiding, unchangeable temple, in which has been heard no sound of axe or hammer, which no Chaldean or Roman can destroy. And the linen is indeed pure and white, and the girdles

of these priests of the inner temple are indeed golden. The prophet never needed this vision of their purity and brightness more than now, for they bear with them the seven last plagues. He must have his own belief strengthened—he must strengthen ours—that what we call vengeance is indeed punishment, that judgments are verily for the separation of light from darkness, that the kingdom of light is to prevail for ever, and the kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown.

Upon whom the seven vials were poured out, and what were the effects of them, the next chapter is to tell us. What we learn here is that they are full of the wrath of God. I have wished you seriously to consider that expression, and to give it all the force which it can derive from the adoption of it by the last of the Bible seers. A Jew himself, he must be taken as the interpreter of its use by his fathers; the man who has set forth all the mysteries of Christian theology, may tell us what place it holds in that theology. He does not see less wrath burning through the universe than Moses or David saw; in his visions it penetrates more deeply to the centre of things; it is spread over a larger circumference. Everywhere the consuming fire is at work; it will not cease till its task is accomplished. The wrath is of Him that liveth for ever and ever. That which is true of one time is true of another. The same Being must be carrying on the same war; that winepress which His Son trod in the wilderness, in the garden, on the cross, must be fully trod. What He died and rose to vanquish, all the powers of creation must be fighting against. Let us understand it and believe it. They are fighting against it in you and me, and in the whole world; whatever in us loveth and maketh a lie, whatever lie is usurping dominion over

men, the God who liveth for ever and ever hates with an unquenchable hatred ; this in each human creature, in the whole of human society, is encountering His fierce and eternal wrath. Would you ask that it should be less fierce ? Would you like to fix a time when it shall not burn ? Oh, then, you pray for your own ruin and the world's ; you pray that you may be left to your own lies—to the father of lies ; you pray that the Infinite Love to which you owe every joy that you ever had or can have, shall come to an end, shall give place to that other wrath which cherishes everything that is evil, which seeks to devour everything that is good. Let us hope, and stedfastly believe, that that shall never be ! Let us receive this assurance of God's word that it never shall. There are moments—the prophets say so—when the plagues that darken the world appear to close even the temple of God, so that none can enter into it. But they are sent forth from that temple ; they are to clear the air of the mists which have hidden it from the spirits of men. It may be that on this day, as you have listened to the news of the Father of an Infinite Majesty, of the honourable, true, and only Son, and of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, dwelling in blessed and eternal Unity, visions have floated before you which have concealed that beautiful and glorious vision. Why, you have asked, am I to be told of an eternal wrath which is about those who confound the Person, or divide the Substance ? And if by an eternal wrath—a wrath of God—you have meant an earthly wrath, the wrath of an evil, selfish man, or of an evil spirit, you may well ask how can goodness and wickedness, light and darkness, be brought into such close proximity ? Or if by those against whom this wrath is directed you



have understood some neighbour in this time, or some one who has passed out of the world in the times gone by, you may well have trembled lest you should be bringing down upon yourselves the dreadful sentence, "With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." But if you have given to eternal wrath that sense which it bears in this Divine book, that which connects it with the God who liveth for ever and ever, then surely you cannot but desire for your own sakes, and for the sake of mankind, that there should be no mitigation of this wrath till there has perished utterly and for ever whatever in men's hearts, or will, or reason, tends to confound blessed distinctions, or to rend asunder that which is one. We shall find how much there is in ourselves which leads to that confusion and that division; we shall perceive how it mingles with all our thoughts, darkening and dividing the forms and operations of the outward world, the intercourse of life, the contemplation of the history and character of men, as well as the Nature of God. We shall desire God's judgment to search us, that we may see all things as they are in God's Divine light, not mixed together by our fantasy, not rent asunder by our incapacity of tracing their inward harmony. We shall be sure that the same causes which make us refuse justice to the differences of other men, and shrink from fellowship with them, interfere with our apprehension of the perfect Unity which is revealed in the Persons of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. We shall not doubt that the full revelation of that Mystery of Love which in words we have confessed to-day, will be a revelation of the glory of God in man, and through the whole earth. We shall not

doubt that when we enter thoroughly into that revelation, we shall have gotten a victory over the selfish power which seeks to set heaven and earth at war; that we shall be able to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, the song of triumph over fallen tyranny and division, the song of a redeemed and reconciled universe.

## LECTURE XVI.

### THE VIALS.

And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels,

Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged us. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed

is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.—REV. xvi.

ANY ordinarily attentive reader will perceive a great resemblance between the events which were said to follow the blowing of the trumpets and those which are here seen to follow the pouring out of the vials. When the first four trumpets sounded, the earth, the sea, the rivers, the sun were smitten. Here we read of the same calamities in the same succession. The river Euphrates is connected with the sixth trumpet and with the sixth vial; the voice, "It is finished," accompanied the seventh trumpet as well as the seventh vial. There are several minute differences, to which I may refer presently. There is one leading and startling difference which seems to determine the purport of the respective visions. When the fifth trumpet sounded, a star fell from heaven upon the earth, the bottomless pit was opened, locusts came forth, which did not hurt the grass or the trees, but only those men who had not the seal of God on their foreheads, which did not kill them, but tormented them for five months. The fifth vial "*was poured out upon the seat of the beast, and his kingdom was full of darkness, and they gnawed*

*their tongues for pain.*" That the trumpet imported the downfall and ruin of a great spiritual dynasty, and the moral and spiritual misery which is consequent upon such a fall, I tried to show you when I was occupied with that subject. That this vial imports the perdition of a dynasty not spiritual at all, but essentially brutal, though once, it may be, upheld by spiritual sanctions, the words themselves would teach us, if no light fell upon them from previous or subsequent passages. Everything so far would appear to favour that method of considering these prophecies which I have adopted. The trumpets would be all announcements of the fall of the spiritual centre of the old world; they would point to Jerusalem. The vials would concern what I may call the material centre of the old world; they would point to Rome. But they would not concern Jerusalem and Rome at different epochs of history; they would denote a crisis through which the two cities were passing within the same three or four years.

I. What those three or four years were, and what we know to have been passing in them, I have partly considered already; the seventeenth chapter will bring the question distinctly before us. The subject for to-day leads us to reflect upon the different aspects in which the same events may be presented to the mind of a prophet. "*And the first went and poured forth his vial upon the earth, and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and upon them that worshipped his image.*" There was no allusion in the eighth chapter to any calamity that befel human beings from the hail and fire mingled with blood which were cast upon the earth; only the third part of the trees and of the green grass were said to be

burnt up. There we were hearing a trumpet; here we are seeing a vial poured out. There earth was smitten; those who had been called out to declare who is the Lord of the earth, and had not declared Him to men, or believed in Him themselves, were to read His *Mene Mene* written on their walls. To the others it could not have that significance. They only feel the effects of the visitation. It comes upon them as a noisome and grievous sore. They smart under the plague. The lesson reaches them through their bodies. Let it not, however, be supposed that the message may not have come in this form to the inhabitants of Judæa. They, too, were worshippers of the beast. They were becoming incapable of rising to a conception of anything but material losses and sufferings. And there may have been many of the heathens who saw a Divine hand in the infliction, who glorified God in the fires. The distinction between the two purposes of the judgment is not affected by the mode in which it was received by this person or that.

II. "*And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man, and every living soul died in the sea.*" This it will be said is the language of poetry or prophecy, not of fact. I have asked you before whether you are sure that the language of poetry or prophecy does not represent facts more faithfully than the language of statistics. Do you think a statement of the number of persons who die in a wreck—let it be of the most petty fishing smack—conveys the history of that wreck? Is not the picture of a great artist truer? Many of you, I am sure, will be familiar with that memorable passage of Jeremy Taylor, in which he supposes a man "from one of the battlements of heaven to espy how many men and women at



that time lie fainting and dying for want of bread ; how many young men are hewn down by the sword of war ; how many orphans are weeping over the graves of their fathers, by whose help they are enabled to eat ; to hear how many mariners and passengers are at this moment in a storm, and shriek out because the keel dashes against a rock or bulges under them ; how many people there are that weep with want and are mad with oppression, or are desperate by too quick a sense of a constant infelicity." Surely there was no exaggeration in these thoughts. Such a spectacle must at any instant, in Taylor's age or ours, have been presented to one who stood on that point of observation.

It is not so horrible as the vision of a single den of tyranny which is sometimes laid bare to our eyes when it is about to pass away. St. John *is* beholding the withering of the earth, and the destruction at sea, from one of the battlements of heaven. We might describe it by some dry abstraction such as the overthrow of commercial prosperity, the interruption of the intercourse between nations. To him it is as if the sea became *the blood of a dead man*.

III. "*And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters ; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink ; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*" There is nothing which often puzzles us more than the sense of Divine retribution. The conscience witnesses for it ; ever and anon we are sure that we recognise it. Not

to confess it, appears like a practical confession that chance is the Lord of All. Not to confess it, makes every calamity which is inflicted upon human beings far more frightful and ghastly, as if an evil spirit was indulging its malice. The belief of retribution was the staff of heathen faith amidst all its corruptions; Jewish prophets lived to proclaim it; surely the Gospel cannot have taken away the right from us. And yet there are those words of our Lord about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, and those citizens of Jerusalem upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. There is the warning to the disciples who thought the blind man or his parents must have sinned. There is the universal sentence overreaching and maintaining all these particular instances, "*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*" There are the manifold transgressions of this command which we ourselves have committed, and which we have seen others commit, in the effort to make specific inflictions accord with specific crimes. There are those cruel recriminations with which every page of ecclesiastical history is blotted; each party discovering the most manifest tokens of Divine vengeance against the other. How can we uphold our faith in the exact suitableness of the wrongs which men do to the corrections which God appoints for them, in the face of these warnings from the highest authority and from our own experience?

There are two methods, I believe, which may help us to do this if we will pursue them faithfully. The first is, to fix our minds steadfastly upon the word *Judgment*, to give it its full force, not to accept any poor substitutes for it. Judgment means, in its ordinary use, discrimination, the assigning to each thing its real worth, the separation of that which is real from

that which is merely apparent or counterfeit. Mean *that* when you speak of God's judgments. Mean nothing whatever which is inconsistent with that. And then you must suppose that He does make His purposes manifest, and that He will make them more manifest. You will ask that they may be made manifest to you. And the more you ask that, and the more you expect an answer, the more horror you will feel at the thought of putting your judgments in the place of God's, your rash and partial guesses between you and His revelation. You will feel more every day how you are tempted to do this; you will feel how you long to pull out the motes from other men's eyes, and to forget the beams in your own. You will not plead that you must do this to a certain extent, in order that you may not hide from men that God is judging them. You will feel that in any degree in which you do it, you are doing something to prevent the effect of God's judgments, something to make them less credible to your fellow-creatures.

The second rule is a corollary from this. Always try to understand the retribution of God first in your own case. There it will become evident to you if you look for it. You will see that the correction has been graciously adapted to the faults in your character which need it. You will see that where you have sown the wind, you have very often indeed reaped the whirlwind. Very often; but not always. It has not been a mere progress from antecedents to consequents. There has been a Judge, who has been directing the step from one to the other; who has—oh, how continually!—turned the very evil you have done or plotted into an instrument of humiliation—therefore of good. That of which the natural fruit would have

been mere remorse, and therefore greater sin, has been the means of leading you to repentance, and so to the deliverance from sin. Such discoveries do not force us to imagine exceptions in the course of God's dealings. They are the highest examples and illustrations of His dealings. They bring out the principle of retribution in its fullest power. So in great historical crises, like that which we are considering, there comes a flash of light from Heaven, showing how the rivers and fountains of water, those blessed gifts of God which have nourished the life and health of nations, are turned into blood, are made poisonous and destructive; not through some accident, but in obedience to an everlasting law. Those who have borne witness against the perversion of these gifts, the saints and prophets who have testified that the good things which are bestowed upon men, are not to be turned to purposes of pride and covetousness, are not to be diverted from their human channels into selfish channels, these have been made victims of their protest. Their blood has been mingled with these waters; they have been offered up to propitiate the selfish divinities who they declared were no divinities at all. "And now, O Lord," so sings the Angel of the Waters, "Thou hast claimed these as Thine own. Men who used them for their bloody purposes, must drink blood. They would not receive the waters as given for the nourishment of the earth; the waters shall bring no longer nourishment, but death to them."

IV. "*And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun : and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues : and they repented not to give him*

*glory."* Those persons who seek to discover what plagues in modern days correspond to the Apocalyptic plagues, can never be long at a loss for parallels. That they occurred at a certain time, which has been defined with considerable precision already, and will be defined more accurately still in a later passage of the book, I cannot doubt. But plagues on earth, on the sea, in the fountains of waters, and this from excessive heat, cannot be limited to one country or to one century. Those who suppose the words to have some other more refined, more cabalistical sense, may justify that sense as they can, and apply it to our practical guidance. Those who think that the prophet was shewn how all the different portions and powers of the natural world were becoming instruments of punishment to those who had degraded themselves and their fellows into mere servants of these natural powers—witnesses, therefore, against idolatry, and for the true Ruler of men—will thankfully admit that they have not lost their functions, that the purpose to which they ministered then may be accomplished by them now. Nor will their failure to work any general repentance—the exasperation and blasphemy which they provoked—remove them out of the circle of our experience. Are not these rather very solemn indications to us that we must not expect moral renewal for ourselves or our brethren from the terrors which are inspired by any natural agents? The God of Life speaks through them; speaks to our spirits. If our spirits hear Him, they are bowed; let the Angel of Death flap his wings ever so loudly, they will be scared, not changed.

And now we come to that vial of which I have spoken already, as denoting the object of them all.

V. *“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”* The tribulation which is here announced in a few rapid words, is the subject, I conceive, of the two following chapters. In these chapters we are told where the seat of the beast is, in language so very distinct and unmistakable that there has been little—I believe no—difference of opinion respecting it. Rome, in some period of its existence—Rome, under some kind of ruler, imperial or spiritual—has been accepted by all readers as fulfilling the terms of the description. I do not think the prophet has stopped short at this point. I think he has been just as careful in fixing what ruler he intended as in fixing the capital of his government. At present, our business is not with the person, but with the nature of his dominion. We are to connect it with all that has gone before in this vision. Those who worship the beast, and bear his image, are those who have not the faculty of conceiving of anything as omnipotent and Divine except that which is earthly, sensual, devilish. He whom they worship is the embodiment of the earthly, the sensual, the diabolical. He is the transcendent, concentrated manifestation of that which is partial and scattered in those whom he governs. Suddenly there comes an eclipse of his power, and a confusion over all their plans. Something there is—what they cannot say—which is threatening them and their works. They are in darkness. They cannot feel their way. What is coming? Is it light? Oh not that! let that, at least, be far from us. We are in misery enough already. Let it not approach to torment us more. They gnawed



their tongues with pain, and blasphemed the *God of heaven.*

VI. "*And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.*"

In the passage of the ninth chapter which answers to this, four angels, which had been bound on the great river Euphrates, were set loose. Regarding the Euphrates as the prophetic symbol for the boundary which separated the Babel world from the holy city, I supposed this trumpet to indicate that that boundary would now cease to exist; that the work for which Judæa had been marked out as a separate kingdom in the midst of the earth was done; that whatever witness might be hereafter borne against the Babel principle would not be borne by a separate nation with a local centre. The change was a tremendous one—a great shaking would precede and follow it—but it was a change which all the trumpets had been foretelling. When it was made, the last of them would utter its voice; the final message of the age would go forth. That change and that final message are as important for the Gentile world as the Jewish. Contemplated in reference to the first, the Euphrates is said to be *dried up, that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared.* The ceasing of the Jewish polity and the Jewish witness might appear to set the world free to obey its idol potentates, to accept the last incarnation of evil as its supreme lord. On the great throne of the West sat that incarnation of evil. To that throne the countries of the West bowed; the East had fallen before it. Was not that royalty which the children of Shem had hoped to exercise over the earth in the name of the one Lord God passing for

ever away? No, not passing away! rather for the first time beginning to be manifested and felt. The Child to whom the Magi came, bringing their gold and frankincense, will now commence His march over those kingdoms of the West which the Roman tyrant had claimed for himself. They are not this tyrant's; they are held by an older title. The West shall do homage to the East. There shall be a Christendom confessing the God of Abraham for its God; the Son of David for its King.

Does it seem strange to you that I should speak of that which is called a vial of wrath as containing such a signification as this? You must stumble at every passage in the Apocalypse if you discover any contradiction in the idea of the highest blessings being revealed through punishments, which look only like curses. This drying of the Euphrates, if it was to make a road by which the Divine kingdom should pass into new regions, and should establish itself in them, could not take place till the Roman polity had been shown to be built of brittle clay—till the Jewish polity had disappeared. Nor could it take place without another kind of evil affecting the world—affecting, I believe, especially the Christian portion of the world. It is indicated in the next verses.

VII. *“And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”*

The message of a Divine Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, was that which the Apostles delivered to Gentiles as well as Jews. It broke down the middle wall of partition between them ; it was, in Apocalyptic phrase, a drying of the Euphrates.

But that same message evoked all the notions about spiritual influences and powers which had been slumbering in men's minds, which had been hidden under their different mythological conceptions and traditions. Hence, as I observed when speaking of the locusts, that were said, in a former chapter, to overspread the earth, a greater outburst of enchanters and magicians—some Heathen, many of them Jewish, not a few like Simon, baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—than had ever been seen in the world before. The craving for glimpses into the invisible world was strong in men's minds ; it grew stronger from the unbelief in their official augurs and priests who had ministered to it in former days : it connected itself with the old Roman religion and the modern infidelity. Those adepts who fed and tried to satisfy this craving might turn it to political or to merely personal ends ; they were nearly sure to combine it with a foul morality ; imperfect spiritual apprehensions and intuitions did not elevate, but undermined that homely sense of honesty and justice, which had descended, with however many stains and corruptions, from the republican times. These, I apprehend, are the frogs that proceeded out of the mouth of the dragon, and the beast, and the false prophet ; mixing the coarsest animal with the most subtle spiritual wickedness. It is no exaggeration and no metaphor to say that they went forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world. They were the Roman generals and

proconsuls to whom these enchanters addressed themselves, into whose ears they whispered their divinations, whose counsels they influenced by their Babylonian numbers. Christian men, if they did not yield to the fascination themselves, must have been often exceedingly perplexed by the reports which they heard of predictions accomplished and wonders performed. If they trusted to their sagacity in detecting impostures, to their tests for ascertaining what are true and what false miracles, they must have been continually imposed upon. They could not but discern a number of resemblances in these tricks to that which was most precious in their own traditions. Old fences had been swept away; the outward protection which the difference of the circumcised from the uncircumcised had afforded was no longer of avail. This defence, however, remained—"Behold I come as a thief." The Judge stands at the door. The Son of Man, the Detector of all tricks and falsehoods, will be revealed. Will this spiritual conceit of mine bear His scrutiny? The prediction may come to pass; this juggling may be successful. But am I not a child of the light? Do not these works shrink from the light?

And now comes in this further assurance. A battle of the powers of light and darkness is close at hand. All these teachers of the kings of the earth are collecting them to that battle. They may be worshipping a beast; but they are spirits, and spiritual powers must rouse them even to the gratification of the lowest instincts; a fearful lesson which every age confirms, but which in all great crises of history stands out and writes itself in characters of blood.

VIII. "*And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the*

temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, *It is done.* And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

When the last trumpet sounded, there were voices in heaven—saying, "*The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever.*" The voice, "*It is done,*" which accompanies the pouring out of the vial, I have taken to point to the same end and to mean the same thing. An age of the world was ending. The question of that age had been, Whose are the kingdoms of the world? The hour of decision was come. Christ and Antichrist were to encounter each other. The place which denotes the conflict is curiously chosen. The name Megiddo is associated with two grand triumphs of the Israelites, with two memorable defeats. It is symbolical for both reasons. The battle of Armageddon is one in which the Lord God is fighting with the beast. He is to win the victory. So far, it is like the victory of Barak over Sisera, of Gideon over the Amalekites. But it is a victory in which Israel is not to rise, but to perish. So far, it corresponds to the overthrow of Saul and of Josiah. The prophet is a patriot to the last. But it is the God of Israel who lives for ever and ever; let

the seed of Abraham, let his own Church become nothing, that He may be exalted. Let the blind and captive Samson pull down the pillars of the house upon himself if so be Dagon and his worshippers may fall with him. Of this fall, the next chapters are to tell us. I receive them as records of a triumph that has been won, and, therefore, as an undoubted pledge and assurance of a triumph that shall be won, for God and for man.



## LECTURE XVII.

### THE GREAT CITY.

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings

one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them : for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings : and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.—REV. xvii.

IN a former chapter, we had the vision of a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet. In this chapter, we read of a woman on whose forehead was written "*Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth.*" That the two visions answer to each other, all have perceived. A Protestant controversialist would tell us at once that the first describes the true Church of God, which has been kept alive upon the earth through different ages—obscure in the sight of man, in the eyes of its Divine Lord beautiful and glorious ; that the latter points to the Papacy, which has been seated on a throne full of outward grandeur and power, but marked with God's sign of doom as idolatrous and apostate.

An interpretation which has penetrated into the mind of a nation like ours, which affects our popular speech, colours our devotions, it is not safe to discard. There must be a significance in it. If we are indifferent to that significance, we are in danger of missing some of the lessons which the prophecy has been meant to teach, of contracting it according to some individual conceit, of reducing it into mere antiquarian lore.

But there are other applications of the title, great Babylon, which, on the same principle, we ought not to overlook. It has been bestowed upon the city of London, the very capital of Protestantism, and our consciences have accepted it as appropriate. Again, the most earnest religious teachers have exhorted their hearers to flee from Babylon, to avoid any intercourse with the Babylonian harlot, meaning by either phrase that world which Romanists as well as Protestants renounce in their baptism. Whilst we are doing justice to one of these forms of speech, we should try whether it is not possible to do justice to all three. If we adhere strictly to the book itself, I believe that we may.

I have given you my reasons for considering that the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, and about to bring forth the man-child, is a vision of humanity, under its true aspect; in itself weak and feminine; great only while it looks up to a glory above its own, which becomes its vesture; poor and incomplete till it has found a Son of Man who is also a Son of God, who does not tarry upon earth, but is carried to the throne of heaven, who there is to be recognised as our living Head, our Redeemer, our Representative. The discovery of this true Head of Man, and of the glory of Man in Him, I regarded as the subject of the vision. Before this discovery could be made, there was war in heaven; when it was made, the adversary was cast down from heaven. There was no more darkness over the form of Him who sat upon the throne. Those who confessed the Crucified Man to be at His right hand, could overcome all doubts and temptations by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony. But there was war upon the earth. The

adversary had not ended his battle here, but was carrying it on with fury. What that battle was, who would be engaged in it, we were to learn as we proceeded.

Taking the first vision in this sense, it would, I thought, justify those who said that the Church was implied in it. If the Church is that body which, in its own life and acts, is appointed to testify of a Son of Man and a Son of God, to say that humanity is only complete in Him, to bid men claim the glory which He has claimed for them; to tell them that the face of God has been fully manifested in the only begotten Son, and, therefore, that we know it to be a face of clear, unclouded light; it must, in its hour of deepest sorrow, which has been its hour of greatest triumph, represent the woman who sees the sun above her head and the moon at her feet. She must be in danger of looking at the moon rather than the sun—at herself rather than at her Divine Head.

On the other hand, I have shown you how the idea of a woman forgetting her true lord, and becoming a harlot, is embodied in all the language of the Old Scriptures, and is the illustration of all national transgressions. This harlotry is, of necessity, attributed, in the Old Testament, to Israel—to Israel exclusively—to Israel *because* it is said to have been claimed as the bride of an unseen and spiritual Lord. The sin which earns for it this disgraceful name is idolatry. It forgets its unseen King, and becomes the worshipper of visible things—it becomes a creature of sense. In doing this, it tries to be like the nations round about, whereas it was set in the world to tell those nations that they were created for another service, for a nobler fellowship. For this crime,

the punishment was captivity in the land which gathered into itself the idolatry of all the nations; where idolatry had its head and crown; where idolatry was organised into a system; where it was the obvious and confessed support of a universal tyranny; where it was rapidly passing into the mere worship of a mortal ruler; where this worship was rapidly degenerating into the worship of that which is below humanity.

Babylon, then, contemplated in its first form on the plain of Shinar—where trust in God was exchanged for trust in brick walls—where the family that had been rescued from the waters forgot its work of colonising and subduing the earth, and tried to make itself a name, and to build a tower which should reach to heaven; Babylon, contemplated in all its subsequent tyranny and conquests, was the living type of the idolatrous city. And when the chosen Son was revealed as the head, not of one nation, but of every man, then the idolatrous city began to be contemplated as the mother of harlots; as that which had been all along withdrawing men from the worship of a Spiritual Being, who was their Lord, and Friend, and Redeemer, to be worshippers of a multitude of natural things or powers—to be the worshippers of that which was not the archetype of man, but his image—to be worshippers of evil instead of good. From the hour that the mystery of God—the mystery of a redeemed humanity—was revealed, Babylon became the mystery of iniquity, that which represented the degradation and misery of humanity, socially and individually. There was no need that the place should remain the same. That which had been Nineveh under Sennacherib was Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. The type remained,

though a city of the West, in quite a different stage of civilisation and development, became the ruling power of the earth.

If, then, as we Protestants believe, there has been and is, a system diffused through Christendom which deprives man of his true elevation, which intercepts his communication with his risen and ascended Lord, which separates heaven and earth, by making a mortal man the highest of all rulers—if that system deserves to be called idolatrous and apostate; then, surely, that is a true instinct which connects this system with Babylonian harlotry; just because our charges against it imply that it is a relapse into the condition of the heathen world, that it has canonised that despotism of sense from which the birth and glorification of the Man-child was to redeem the creatures whom God had created in His image. If, again, in this city there is, in clergy and laity, in the idle and the busy, the noble, the tradesman, the artisan, on one plea or another, upon religious or irreligious pretexts, in deference to aristocratical or democratical notions, a disposition to reverence the visible more than the invisible, the transitory more than the permanent, the traditions of society more than moral and eternal laws—if this disposition has gained great power, and threatens to become supreme, then it is also a true instinct which recalls the greatness of Babylon, when we are tempted to exult in the greatness of London, and foretells that the one may not be stabler than the other. It might be equally right for a citizen of Paris, or Madrid, or Vienna, or Venice, to have this feeling. But our consciences tell us that we have less to do with Paris, or Madrid, or Venice, or Vienna, than with London; that their evils are, to a certain extent, alien from us, that its evils are our own.



And therefore it is right also that those who are teaching children or men that they should renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, should explain what they mean by saying, "Now, as in the old time, there are idols' processions, and sacrifices offered to vain things, that cannot help or deliver. Members of Christ, who gave up Himself, you are tempted by a society which makes self its centre. Children of God, you are tempted to think that you are children of Mammon, and that all the things about you are bowing to him. Inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, you are led to suppose that there are no treasures for you but those which the moth and rust corrupt, which thieves break through and steal. An evil atmosphere is about you. Call your world religious, political, commercial, fashionable, by what epithet you please, it is still a harlot world, a world of sense; it is still a Babylonian world, a world of confusion and of bondage." But then, these different applications all denote a foregone conclusion. They would be worth nothing if there were not some type of them in the old world; what that is we are to learn from the Apostle himself, who will always tell us more than his commentators.

The first six verses of this chapter refer to the *mystery* of this woman; that is to say, to the meaning of the symbol; to that which is not of one time, but of all times; to that evil which has been threatening the heart of human society ever since there was a human society. They are connected with the previous vision of the seven vials; they point, as all the previous chapters have done, to an impending judgment.

I. "*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great*

*whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness; and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abomination and filthiness of her fornication. And upon her forehead was a name written, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and I wondered with great admiration.”*

In a vision of the Prophet Zechariah, which has many striking points of resemblance to this, and which evidently sets forth the mystery of wickedness as opposed to the Divine mystery which was represented in the Temple at Jerusalem, an angel speaks to the seer of a “House in the land of Shinar, which shall be established and set there upon her own base.” A polity standing upon its own base, its gods formed out of human conceptions, by help of them becoming a cruel and bloody tyranny—this is the idea of Babylon here and throughout the Scriptures. The final result has been brought before us often. She who would not stand upon a Divine ground must at last be supported by a beast. Humanity has but a choice between the two. She must confess at last a spiritual Lord or a brutal Lord. In the progress to her complete degradation, she has been drinking the blood of righteous men who have borne witness to her of her true greatness and of her

fall. All these are called martyrs of Jesus. It signifies not when or where they lived, in what city of the earth they were sending forth their protest, in what words or acts it was expressed. So far as they were testifying that man is more than an animal; that there is a Divine Power who is seeking to give him his true human rights; that he is not to save his life, but to lose it; not to glorify self, but to give himself away; so far they were witnesses for Jesus, so far His Spirit and no other was working in them. An apostle must needs say so. Other men might call them brave or heroic. He must refer everything that is good in man to the Lord of Man—all partial light to the perfect light.

Next, we proceed to the explanation of this mystery in reference to the particular period about which the prophecy is occupied.

II. *“And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and one is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.”* The explanation of the Babylon of that day which is given by the angel has, I observed last Sunday, been accepted by all interpreters as clear and conclusive.

Rome, they have agreed, must be signified by it. The only question has been, Rome at what period? On this point I said I thought that the statement was quite as precise as upon the other. Supposing there are those grounds which I stated in a former sermon, for regarding the establishment of the military despotism under Augustus along with the divine honours that were attributed to him as the head of that despotism, and the Incarnation or proclamation of Christ's kingdom, as parallel events in the world's history, Augustus would then be the first of the five kings spoken of here. Tiberius would, of course, be the second, Caius Caligula the third, Claudius the fourth, Nero the fifth. These kings are not. In the absence of any evidence for the old tradition that the Apocalypse belongs to the time of Domitian, almost any thoughtful critic would accept this very passage as a reason for referring it to the reign of Galba. He, the sixth, was; Otho, the seventh, was not yet come. A figure was seen rising behind—an eighth, and yet strangely like one of the seven. When Nero died, it seemed as if the wild beast into which imperial government had transformed itself was extinct. Vitellius would show that it lived and breathed. The world would not only submit to the new apparition, but would gaze after ' with a blank astonishment, as if beastly tyranny had now proved itself to be omnipotent, as if there could be nothing else intended for mankind; a most natural conclusion, and which facts appeared fully to justify; which every experiment for shaking off the yoke only confirmed. None who merely looked at passing events, and reasoned from them, could resist the belief in the permanent predominance of evil. Only those whose names were in the book of life from

the foundation of the world, who looked at all things in the light of eternity, and saw a book of life unrolling itself from the beginning, and claimed a place in that roll instead of the roll of death—only they could sing confusion to the beast in his hour of triumph; only they would be sure that he could last but for a short space. I do not say that the followers of the tyrant might anticipate any long duration for his power. Anticipation belongs to men, to spiritual beings; *they* could feel nothing but the leaden weight of the present; *they* could only suppose that such a yoke as was on the earth then must be always. And so it has been again and again, and so it will be. The revelation may belong directly to the short space during which Vitellius reigned. But it is the revelation of that temper of mind which overtakes, in one time or another, those who have no king but Cæsar, who, being “sensual and dark,” must carry the image of a sensual and dark tyranny in their hearts.

III. “*And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no power as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their strength and power to the beast.*”

I have already supposed these horns to be significant of that military force upon which the empire rested. The ten kings would then be the commanders of the legions in the different provinces, who had received no power as yet, though they had just as much title to the purple, and were as likely some day to obtain it, as the usurper with whom they were content to work, and for whom they suspended their own pretensions. There could not be a more faithful

account of an organised anarchy. The state out of which Hobbes supposed society to emerge was the state into which it had sunk.

IV. "*These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them : and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*"

In old Roman legends, champions upon horseback, who were recognised as the divine Twins, appeared suddenly to cheer the falling host, and were seen no more when the victory was won. An old Hebrew, an apostle of Jesus Christ, has no sympathy with such legends. He does not want *appearances*. The prophecy is to deliver us from slavery to shapes and apparitions. These were for the sense-bound idolater. The Christian man believed in the crucified Lamb, whom he could not see. Whatever visible hosts are fighting, he beholds the real King of kings and Lord of lords engaged on one side, and His enemy on the other. What would always give him strength for such a crisis as that we are reading of would be the assurance that unseen hosts were on his side, and that Christ was leading them, and that therefore the beast would go down to perdition. And the first century was to give the watchword to all centuries to come. Whenever a conflict has been going on, in which the order, freedom, and well-being of mankind is interested, it signifies not what are the powers of the combatants, it signifies not whether they know in what name they are fighting. The victory which is to put down the oppressor is the victory of the Lamb. He, and the chosen, and faithful, and true, are going forth against the beast. *In hoc signo vinces* is a message to the true warrior. God's Spirit can bring it to him without any cross in the sky.



V. “*And he said unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*”

When the armies of the Duke of Bourbon entered Rome, and in the name of Charles V., the upholder of the Church, laid waste the holy city with fire and sword, and took its spiritual ruler captive, no doubt the Reformers of the sixteenth century thought that this language was strikingly fulfilled. The great powers of the earth were making desolate and naked the “*great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth. God had put into the hearts of these soldiers of different lands to fulfil His will.*” Supposing the like drama had been enacted above fourteen centuries before—suppose Rome then had been laid waste by military violence, and its Capitol burnt—the Reformers of the sixteenth century will not have been wrong in saying that the lesson was repeated in their day; that the same kind of instruments were at work in both cases; that the judgment, by whomsoever it was executed, went forth from the highest throne of all; that the wicked and cruel tools were working out His great and gracious and true will. Such thoughts are the only ones which can sustain men’s spirits through great crises—the only ones which can enable them to endure the misery which they witness. The Reformers marred the lesson if they turned it to any party use—

if they read in the victory of the Bourbon a judgment in favour of Protestantism, not a judgment upon unrighteousness, and corruption, and hypocrisy, where-soever it is found. That has been one most mischievous effect of our mode of dealing with the Apocalypse, which I have endeavoured to illustrate in this sermon. We have found Babylon in the Papacy; we have forgotten to look for it among ourselves. We have not seen that the harlotry of sense is at work everywhere; that everywhere men are tempted to become idolaters; that everywhere there are seducers, withdrawing them from their true Husband and Lord. The far-off evil we have discerned; its punishment we are prepared to hail; that which is at our own door, at our own hearts, is not visible to us; we do not remember that God is no respecter of persons; that Churches which acknowledge the supremacy of Rome, and Churches that reject it, individual Papists and individual Protestants, Pharisees, and Publicans, will alike be winnowed with His fan—must alike have their chaff consumed with unquenchable fire.

And this evil result of hasty and partial interpretation is closely connected with another. We speak of a Papal apostasy till we forget what the very word apostasy means. We forget that we stand off from that which is our proper standing-ground; that if we revolt it is from a government which is actually established over us. There could not have been an apostasy if there had not been a kingdom of God set up in the world. We have given Popery an honour to which it has no claim when we have identified it with the Christian Church of a number of centuries, when we have supposed that only some little body here and there represented the Divine election. It is a most

necessary part of faith to believe that a fungus, however widely diffused, however nearly it may approach the life, is not the tree which it is destroying; that that is wholly of a right seed. Forgetting this truth, all history becomes nothing but a record of foul enormities. It is a record not of the reign and conquests of the Lamb, but of the Beast. Forgetting this, we at once glorify ourselves, as if we were better than others, and degrade ourselves by denying the glory and responsibilities which have been put upon us and upon them equally. London at one moment exalts itself as the great contrast to Rome; in the next it sinks into a mere Babylon, in which evil is the rule, the good the rare exception. Whereas, we ought to believe that both Rome and London are cities of redeemed men, in which God has set up His kingdom, and which the citizens of one or the other turn into a Babylon, by disbelieving in their redemption and in His rule, by exalting their own idolatrous, sensual, selfish inclinations, in contempt of their own human greatness, in defiance of His Divine purposes.

For this, I believe, lies at the root of all our moral evils, that we do not confess humanity to be married to Christ; all men to have been claimed as citizens of His kingdom, and not of the Babel kingdom. We do not really confess that God has reconciled the world to Himself; therefore we do not really repudiate the world's assertion that it is separate from God, and that it can live without Him.

From these mighty errors, which are infecting our theology and our life, I believe the study of the Apocalypse, as it is actually written, may be a most effectual means of emancipating us. It will teach us that the Babel society was always corrupt and adul-

terous ; that it never, in any age of the world, could be regarded as the Order of the world. The history and literature of the heathen nations, as our fathers judged when they made them capital parts of our education, though stained and infected with idolatry, bear witness to that which is not idolatrous—are perpetual protests against that which was corrupting and degrading mankind. They looked onward to the incarnation of the Son of God, which asserted all the life, justice, self-sacrifice of the old world to be His. The battle of the Lamb and of the Beast was to vindicate that truth for the past, to make it the foundation of all the fellowship of men in the ages which were to come.

## LECTURE XVIII.

### THE FALL OF BABYLON.

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power : and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according unto her works : in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her : for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine : and she shall be utterly burned with fire : for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city ! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her ; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more ; the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner

vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every ship-master, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee: and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.—REV. xviii.

THE language of the last chapter was precise. The angel spoke of five kings that were not, of one that was, of a seventh that was to come, of an eighth that would be like one of the seven. It spoke of a city set upon seven hills, which ruled over the kings of the earth. Such a description must have been intended, I thought, to fix our minds upon imperial Rome at a



certain epoch. The emperor before Vespasian seemed to be clearly indicated; the scene of the prophecy appeared to be laid in the time between the death of Nero and the overthrow of Vitellius.

The language of *this* chapter is large and general. To identify the description with any calamities which befell the mere city of Rome—supposing the calamities included, as they did, the burning of the Capitol itself—is impossible. I cannot wonder—I cannot regret—that men in different ages should have been sure that it did not concern some past event which affected others; that it concerned them and their doings; that it was a prophecy respecting the world in which they were living. I believe, then, as I said last Sunday, that their instinct is wholly a right one, that the more strictly we adhere to the very words of the book, the more it will be justified.

If the Apostle meant Rome, why did he speak of Babylon? The question has often been asked; the answer which is sometimes given is surely unsatisfactory. It has been supposed that to talk openly would have been unsafe; he was driven to enigmas. Unsafe for whom? He was already in Patmos—would a few years longer on earth signify so much to an apostle that for the sake of them he would suppress the truth? But unsafe, perhaps, because he might have caused a sedition against the ruling powers. Whom could he have tempted to take part in such a sedition? No heathen would have heeded his words. They were especially discouraging to all the dreams of Jewish supremacy. They gave direct warning to the members of the Church, not to take the sword, lest they should perish by the sword. The whole empire, heathen and Jewish, was in anarchy already. What men wanted

was some one to tell them whether the anarchy would last for ever.

We read of the destruction of Babylon, not of Rome, because the destruction of Babylon, not of Rome, was in the mind of the prophet, and of Him who taught the prophet. We read of the destruction of Babylon, and not of Rome, because the words were strictly true respecting the Babel polity of which Rome had become the centre, and would not have been true concerning the mere city, contemplated either as a city of walls or as a city of men. We read of Babylon, and not of Rome, because the subject is a system which had been working for generations, not in one country, but in all countries, and which was to hear its sentence in that generation. We read of Babylon, and not of Rome, that we may not identify that system with one place—be the place as evil as it may—but may study it in all its forms and aspects, may be sure that wherever it has existed, does exist, or shall exist, it is essentially the same.

I. *“And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”*

The darkness of the earth is revealed to St. John by a light from heaven. That light does not permit him to look at any evil as original, at any evil as vic-

torious. Babylon has fallen from a better and nobler state; she has *become* a habitation of demons. The expression clearly points to moral or spiritual wickedness. The "*unclean and hateful birds*" which lodge in the city, are not owls and bitterns, but the covetousness, filthiness, malice, which fill the hollows that better spirits had once occupied. The ruling city had been corrupting the nations with her pride, and ambition, and lust of gold. Kings of the West and of the East had sold their truth and freedom to her; she had debased and besotted them with her luxuries; she had made the traders of the earth tributaries to her greediness. We all know that it was so. If we are afraid of fixing the charge upon the Roman world of the first century, it is because we suspect the words may apply to worlds with which we have been more nearly in contact. We need not be afraid lest they should lose their force. Let them signify what they signified at first. God will take care that they shall not signify less to us.

II. "*And I heard another voice out of heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself and lived delicately, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God which judgeth her.*"

Did this voice from heaven mean that Christians were to fly from Rome because it was about to undergo great calamities? Whither could they fly? What part of the empire was not exposed to the same calamities? Were they more partakers of the sins of Rome by dwelling in her than by dwelling anywhere else? The message, all have felt, must have another significance than this. Babylon was in Rome; but it was also wherever men were worshipping the things they saw and handled, were worshipping their own lusts, were worshipping themselves. It was this worship which had brought the evil spirits into the city; from it, and from them, God calls His people to come out. All were His people, Jews or Heathens, who would obey that voice, who would confess a righteous Being to be the King and Judge of the earth, who would believe assuredly that what was not righteous must perish. It is hard to believe that; hard for those who profess to believe it most—yes, for those who are thoroughly convinced in their reasons that it cannot be otherwise. Atheism creeps over every one. The more corrupt a society is, the more do the habits and traditions of it impose the feeling upon us that it is to go on; it takes away the heart and hope which should rise against it. If the notion of that society was true—that God has left the world to itself, that He is only just so far as we fancy that He is—there could be no escape from this state of things; the worse it grows, the more pledge it has of perpetuity. But He speaks, and He can make Himself heard. He gives the consciences of men to understand that they shall have their revenge for the debasement and degradation which they have suffered from its vile doctrines and grovelling practices; since these have infected every one that has been brought

within their reach; since there is no man whose standard has not been lowered, whose character has not been impoverished, by them. It is a glorious proclamation for mankind—“*Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works;*” it is the right pæan over the downfall of a demoralising tyranny. Pity it not; it has withered the hearts and souls of human beings; let it wither utterly. The punishment must be in proportion to its luxury and wantonness; in proportion to the heedlessness and stupid confidence which the sins of centuries have generated. “*She sits as a queen;*” what can depose her? She “*is no widow;*” what does she care for any Divine Lord? she “*shall see no sorrow;*” she does not know what sorrow means; she does not understand how it can come near her. And so the destined downfall overtakes her all unprepared; “*in one day there is death, mourning, famine.*” The fire which has gone from her comes back to consume her, for He whom she supposed to be far off is at hand. She finds that righteousness is not a phantasy, but a Person—“*strong is the Lord God that judgeth her.*”

III. “*And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas! alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.*”

The terror of these kings of the earth is not for the fall of a particular dynasty—to that they might be well accustomed—nor for any tribulation that had overtaken Rome: that might, perhaps, have been welcomed. They have no sympathy with the victim; they “*stand afar*

*off for fear of her torment."* But they have a sense of the insecurity and instability of all which they supposed to be most secure and stable. Their world is tottering to its base. The scheme of society, which they took to be immortal, is breaking into pieces. Outward props have failed. It appears to have no inward coherency. The religious notions which it cherished, and which seemed to promise it more than material help, are discarded; men suspect them to be inventions: they have not withheld the rulers from doing what they listed; they shall not withhold the rebels from doing what they list. "*Alas, alas, that great city, Babylon!*" *It stood upon its own base, and that base has given way.*

IV. "*And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and the souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones and pearls! for in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood*



*afar off, and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city ! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness ! for in one hour she is made desolate."*

The particularity of this description constitutes its worth. Comprehend the "*odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and fine flour,*" in some general phrase which shall express the disappearance of material prosperity, and you transport us into a region of vagueness ; the actual cries of the merchants, and the shipmasters, and the sailors, are not heard. I should only weaken the impression of the passage if I commented upon it. There are just one or two words in the midst of it which throw light upon the whole. The traffic is in "*beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and the souls of men.*" There is no distinction in the articles ; they are all contemplated alike as items in a bill of lading, as subjects for barter. The last are chiefly precious as instruments for the production and exchange of the others. They are a part—the least significant, but a necessary part—in the great system. They must be ground into atoms in the whirl of this social machine ; they consume a certain portion of food ; individually they pass away ; their places are supplied by others who perform the same jobs. And the kings of the earth, as well as the merchants, and the shipmasters, and even the sailors, cannot understand how it should be otherwise ; how society should ever be constituted on a different principle from this. For those who draw profit from the labour that is done, for those who do the labour, it is equally difficult to conceive how men should be more than hands for

moulding certain things out of one shape into another shape, or heads for directing the operations of those hands. It is not only a class of tributaries or serfs whom the rulers of the earth reduce to this condition. They are themselves tributaries and serfs. The vision is of a state of society in which they have lost the power of considering that they have any function upon earth but to use "*odours, and frankincense, and fine flour, and wine, and sheep, and oxen,*" in different combinations. It is a world of restless laziness; all asking to be idlers; all contemplating some distant time when they shall succeed in obtaining so much more of the goods of the earth than their neighbours, that they shall be able simply to eat, drink, and be merry. But these children do not find the end of the rainbow for all their running; the serfdom goes on; the merri-ment is to come; the capacity for it grows every day less.

V. And therefore, "*Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her.*"

You, O sons of God, who shouted with joy, because the earth was made very good, because man ruled over all the things which were so bright and glorious, because man looked up to God, and was formed in His image, and worshipped Him; you have seen the spectacle of a wicked world, men bowing to these things and making gods of them. Will you not shout for joy again because God is declaring that this inversion shall not be, because He is bearing witness in thunders and lightnings that His order shall be established, and that that which contradicts it shall come to nought? What have ye been witnessing against, holy prophets, but against this worship of

things, this degradation of man? What have ye been saying but that God will come out of His place to put down those who cause men to toil in the furnace, that he will shew a man to be more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir, that He will bring forth One who shall rule in righteousness, and shall judge the poor, who shall “*reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, who shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall slay the wicked.*” What have you been proclaiming, holy apostles? but that the Son of God *has* taken upon Him the form of a Servant, and *has* become Man; *has* passed on the earth for the carpenter’s son; *has* died the death of the slave and malefactor; *has* risen out of death in His human body; in that body *has* ascended on high, that he might fill all things. Did you suppose that, when you announced this Gospel, you were introducing a new religion into the world, which should overthrow the old, and glorify your names? Did you not understand that you were declaring what is the Divine order and economy of the universe? Did you not understand that you were foretelling the utter downfall and destruction of everything, whatever name it may boast, which reduces man into a slave and an animal, which forbids him to claim his glory as a member of the body of the only begotten Son of God? Will you not rejoice then? for in this downfall of a brutal tyranny, in this anarchy of the ruling city, in this earthquake of all nations, your message is proved to be true; the kingdom of man’s enemy is shewn to be rotten; the kingdom of man’s Father and Redeemer is shewn to be eternal.

VI. “*And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus*

*with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee ; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee ; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee ; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee ; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee : for thy merchants were the great men of the earth ; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."*

The merchants and shipmasters wailed when they saw what was passing in the world. It seemed to them that the system to which they belonged, to which they had given their hearts, was breaking into fragments and another world coming to light. The angel who casts the stone into the sea confirms their dread. He, too, sees in what is happening, the pledge of that which shall happen ; he perceives the doom of the Babel system and polity, in the shock through which, at a particular instant, it is passing. So understanding the nature of prophecy we are delivered from many crude notions respecting it, upon which many opinions disparaging to the authority both of the Old and New Testament, have been raised. "Is it true," we are asked, "that the voice of harpers, and musicians, and trumpeters, were no more heard at all in the city of Rome, after the first century ? Is it true, that *no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he was, was found in her ; and that the voice of the bridegroom and the bride were no more heard at all in her* after the revolution which overtook her in the days of Vitellius ; or after

any event that has befallen her since? Must not, then, St. John have been deceived? Was not the catastrophe which he thought was at hand really distant by a number of yet unfulfilled centuries? Is it not obvious that he was anticipating much more than the destruction of Rome? Was he not looking for the destruction of the world?"

I will take the last question first. I answer it as I have answered it before. If by the destruction of the world is meant the destruction of this earth, as it came from God's hands, St. Paul and St. John did not look for it in their own day, because they did not look for it in any day. The earth was dear to them; they believed Christ had come upon it, to redeem it from its curse; to burn away that which was corrupt in it; to claim it for His Father. If, again, by the destruction of the world is meant the destruction of human society, I answer, the Apostles' Gospel was concerning a kingdom of heaven. They took the utmost pains to show that, by a kingdom of heaven, they did not mean a kingdom somewhere in the clouds; that they did mean a society of men established upon a principle which does not make society destructive and impossible, a society governed by God and not by the Devil. They did not foretell that, in their own day, there would be a destruction of human society; if they had, they would have foretold that the kingdom which they said would have no end was to perish at once. What they did look for was a signal vindication of the law of human society against the transgressors of that law. They did look for this in their own day. They did say that, if it came in their own day, a truth would be manifested for all ages to come. It would be shewn that the earth and human

society stand on a Divine ground, cannot stand on any other ground. One great experiment had been made, and was making, to establish it on a brutal or devilish ground. That experiment should be confounded. The Babel doctrine might have champions, advocates, apostles, by thousands and tens of thousands in the days to come; but it had been demonstrated to be a lie; and each fresh trial of it would supply a fresh demonstration.

And now, then, I will come to the special question concerning Rome. Beyond all doubt, she rose again as an imperial city after the Vitellian anarchy; she continued an imperial city from Vespasian to Augustulus; she gave titles to Cæsars in the East and the West after her own subjection to barbarian masters; the name Eternal City, which had been bestowed by heathens, was endorsed by popes; her laws and customs were imported into every nation of the West; within her actual walls there was heard the voices of harpers and musicians, of bridegrooms and brides; there were all the arts and ornaments of life. So it was, and so the words of prophets and apostles were fulfilled. They said the earth was the Lord's and the fulness thereof; they denied that the pride and vanity of man were the sources of any one outward or inward treasure which man possesses; they said, that He who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not, is the author and upholder of laws, institutions, social order; of all that makes life healthful, convenient, graceful; of all that exalts us above the beasts that perish. And, therefore, they said, that Babylon the Great, which will not confess the earth to be the Lord's and the fulness thereof, which refers all that men possess to their pride and vanity, which debases all laws and institutions into ministers of



arbitrary will, which reduces arts into ministers of materialism and sensuality, must sink like lead in the waters; that whenever, in any kingdom of the earth, its maxims become completely recognised, whenever all other maxims are disbelieved—that kingdom must perish. The voices of the bride and the bridegroom must cease in it; its music must turn to discord. It may revive, it may undergo various transmigrations; but the same law will hold in each one. God will be its upholder; its own lusts and atheism will be undermining it. These lusts and atheism will be most intolerable if they are cloaked with the forms of religion, if the name of God is used to cover the contempt and denial of His nature; if the spirit of selfishness is confounded with His; if the sacrifices in which that spirit delights, the sacrifices of the souls and bodies of men, are offered up as if they were pleasing to the God of Truth. In her, it is said, was found the blood of prophets and of all that had been slain upon the earth. For the murders of all brave men who have stood firm on behalf of the truth, for the murder of all men whatsoever, their souls and bodies, this belief in a false and cruel God is responsible. All are victims of the Babel system. The blood of all is discovered when that system falls.

“What matters where, if *I* am still the same?” are the words which our poet puts into the mouth of Satan. They have a wonderful force in the sense in which he meant them. They have also another force. What matters where, in what city or soil of the earth, under what government or what religion; evil is still the same, selfishness is still the same. The Adversary will make a Babylon wherever men will stoop to him. “What matters where, if *I* am still the same,” are words which He who came to destroy the works of the Devil,

to bruise the serpent's head, is also speaking to our hearts. "Whatever falsehood there is in any society, in any heart, I am able to overcome it. Out of death I can bring life. Whatever has been turned to the service of Babylon, whatever gifts of the earth, whatever faculties, energies, affections of men, in any corner of the universe, are mine. They are the purchase of my blood. I have vindicated them, I will vindicate them, for the service of the kingdom of God."

## LECTURE XIX.

### THE WORD OF GOD.

And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And the smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And I saw heaven open, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were

in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron : and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun ; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God ; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth : and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.—REV. xix.

“WE praise God for His mercies, we pray to avert His judgments.” This is the doctrine which is commonly accepted even by religious men. It clashes strangely with the language of this book. The shouts of praise in heaven, which are echoed by saints on earth, are for God’s judgments. So we have found it before ; nowhere is the lesson more emphatically taught than in the opening of this chapter.

I. “*And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia ; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God : for true and righteous are his judgments : for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four*

*and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen ; Alleluia. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great."*

Are the thoughts of heaven and earth, then, wholly opposed on this subject? Do the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures who are about the throne rejoice in that which makes mortals weep? Do they give thanks and praise that the prayers of mortals have not been answered? that God has executed His vengeance in spite of their efforts to arrest it?

Certain expressions in this passage may make us pause before we adopt this mournful conclusion. One occurs in the first verse; *Salvation* is ascribed unto the Lord our God. Now salvation, in some sense or other, is certainly that for which all men everywhere are praying. If we ask that we may not be visited with a plague of rain and waters which might hinder us from receiving the fruits of the earth, we ask salvation from that plague; if we cry against battle and murder, and sudden death, against privy conspiracy or rebellion, we ask salvation from those dangers; if we pray against pride, malice, hypocrisy, and all uncharitableness, against fornication, against heresy, and schism, and contempt of God's word and commandment, we ask salvation from those evils. It would not seem as if the heavenly hosts were celebrating the defeat of some petitions which had ascended from the earth. If they praise God for His judgments, they connect those judgments with deliverance.

The second verse will explain the first. "*He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his*

*servants at her hand.*" The salvation is from something which has defiled the earth, and made it miserable, and filled it with blood. With all delight they beheld the smoke of that fire which has consumed the earth's tormentors and destroyers, ascending for ever and ever. Not for one age, but for every age, has that fire been kindled; the smoke ascends from each as a pledge and promise for the next. Therefore, the fifth verse breaks down the barrier between those who are in the visible and those who are in the invisible world. All those who fear God, both small and great, are asked to join in beholding the judgment—all are called to praise for it.

Yet though the Apostle does not represent heaven and earth as at variance, but as most truly at one, we ought not to forget that there must be a variance somewhere. And since all our thoughts, wishes, and prayers, cannot but be affected by it, let us not shrink from pressing the inquiry, Where is it? How does it happen that we talk of praying against that which the wisest and holiest appear to pray for? How is it that we dread the result for which they long—in which, when they behold it, they exult?

Supposing I believe that I am in a system which I am to call generally or universally good, though I am conscious that there is much in it which I hate, which torments me, crushes me, devours the life that is in me—I, of course, do not pray, and cannot. The author of that system—if it has an author—has, I presume, made it as he thinks fit. I have nothing to do with it, but to endure it as well as I can; and my endurance will be mixed with a number of curses which break forth from my inmost soul, since its misery can find no other vent. These curses will be directed against the system, suppose I regard it merely as such; they



will be directed against him who set it in motion, if I think there is such a one. And no possible arguments to prove the folly or hopelessness of my rebellion against a state of things to which I am tied and bound, no amount of statistics to shew that things do take a certain course—or even that, after cycles of years, all turns out for the good of the whole—will avail to produce more than the affectation of contentment in me so long as I retain the feelings and necessities of a human being. The only resource one has, is to drown these feelings and necessities. In animal indulgence, in the torpor of a merely sensual existence, a man may learn to submit; otherwise, he will dash his head against the bars of his prison, let him dream ever so little of escape from it.

How do men rise out of the mire into which they are daily sinking more and more deeply? All would say, Not by acquiescence, but by protest. They affirm that mire is not the element in which human beings were meant to live. Though a hundred wish to abide in it, one or two continue to affirm for themselves, and for the rest, that that is not their state; if they can see no other, they can see there must be another. This protest and affirmation become prayer. They believe that somehow, or somewhere, they have a deliverer. If some one has consigned them to this misery, some other must be able to effect their salvation out of it. The desire to fly from it has been put into their mind; the effort to fly has been put into their minds. Whatever be the name of the Deliverer—in whatever region, near or distant, He may dwell—these inspirations have come from Him; He will second them. They ask him to save them from the oppressor—they ask him, if he is mighty enough, to judge between the oppressor and them. Whether the Author of the universe is the

Oppressor or the Deliverer, the Enemy from whom men have to escape, or the Friend in whom they may rest the burden of all their doubts, their dreads, their hopes—this was what all the past ages were striving to know. What we say is, that the revelation of Jesus Christ was the solution of that question. We who receive Him as the Son of God, one with the Lord of all, do aver the Creator of the universe to be the Deliverer of the universe. Whatever makes the earth corrupt, whatever makes human beings corrupt, we believe to come not from His order, but from a breach of His order. We are bound, by our allegiance to Him, not to accept anomalies as laws, but to strive against them. We are bound to believe that He is stirring us to strive against them. We have a right to pray against them, whatever they be, our prayers being merely the response to His inspirations—cries for the triumph of His will over that which opposes it. And if we believe that He is infinitely wise, as well as infinitely good—that we can only see a very little way—we shall leave our petitions, with no cowardice or distrust, in His hands. We believe that He has ordained summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. Continued rains at this season, we think from experience, are likely to hinder the fruits from appearing in their season—to make many starve; that is to say, we believe that they will interrupt or disturb God's blessed order. Do they not, then, come from Him? We believe that, too. Rain is a gift of God, not a curse of the Devil. We believe, therefore, it is sent for some good end; for what special end we know not; that it is for the general end of correcting something which is amiss in our ways of acting or thinking, of making us less stupid and monotonous in our lives, less dependers upon chance,

better husbandmen, less dead to the facts of nature and her demands upon man, we may assume without doubt, provided we assume a Fatherly Ruler of the world at all. To ask for the removal of the punishment is, then, as the prayer we have offered to-day teaches us, to ask for the removal of the cause, whatever it may be; to ask for repentance; to ask that we may be set right. Thus, from whatever point we start, we are brought back to the conclusion that the source of evil lies in the will; that our wills have set themselves in opposition to God's will; that He is working to bring us into our true state; that all natural instruments are His instruments for this end. And therefore, when any tell us that we are continually forgetting the permanence of God's nature and character, and wishing to warp laws to our own convenience, we confess the justice of the imputation, and are most grateful for all help in making it untrue. Therefore, we pray to God in such seasons as this, appealing to Him as being what He was in the generations of old, in the days of Noah's flood, and before those days—appealing to Him as the God of law and order—appealing to Him against our own vicissitudes, irregularities, idolatry of accidents—being certain that, if we do not appeal to Him, if we do not believe in such a God, we *shall* become the sport and slaves of all varying phenomena—we shall be unable to recognise anything firm or constant in the visible or the unseen world.

Thus, then, it is God's judgment we invoke in all cases when we are acting in accordance with the teaching of the Bible or the Church. *They* never teach us to shrink from those judgments. Those texts which appear to justify such a course, if you weigh them well, point the opposite way; yes, and lay bare that very habit of

mind in us which leads us to this perversion and this cowardice. Do you think that the Psalmist, who said, "*Judge me, O Lord, and plead my cause,*" contradicted himself when he said, "*Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified?*" I am satisfied that one of these prayers explains and confirms the other. "Do not, O Lord, look upon me, think of me, judge me as I am, apart from Thee, a poor, wretched, helpless atom, separated from all other atoms, having lost the principle of life and unity. Judge me as I am truly, related to Thee, taking refuge in Thee, beseeching Thee to search and see if there is any wicked way in me, to try me, and seek the ground of my heart, which is in Thyself!" Do you think that St. Paul, when he said, "*Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged by the Lord,*" was contradicting his other assertion in the very same epistle—"I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified; for he that judgeth me is the Lord"? I think you will find that the judgment of God, which he wished them not to incur, was that of being treated as if they were part and parcel of the evil that was cleaving to them; that he wished them to judge between that evil and themselves; and that he bade them look boldly up to God, in His Son, to judge them, and justify them from that evil. And our failure to do this, brethren—our want of belief that God has sent His Son to justify us, and to deliver every one of us from his iniquities—our failure to believe that we do stand in Christ, pure and holy, and without blame, before Him, is the reason why we do not feel as the Apostle did about His judgments upon the world, but cherish just the opposite feeling, a desire that they

should not come, or that they should not reach us. The last is, I think, the worst temper of the two. It is more noble, more righteous, to wish that the world should be allowed to go on in its wickedness and its misery, horrible as that desire is, than to wish that it should pass through the fires, and that we should have a special title of exemption from them. What! is our saintship come to this? Do we really desire to hug our evils, and not to let them be destroyed? Yet such will be our saintship, if the first thought, or the second thought, or the third thought, of our minds is about ourselves—if the first thought is not that which is expressed in this verse:

II. “*And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as of the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.*” And the second thought is like unto it. “*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*” And the third grows out of the first and the second. “*And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.*” Here is the true Divine order: *Hallowed be thy Name*; the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! The eternally righteous Being has all power. He in whom is light and no darkness at all, is proved to be the ground of all things. *Thy kingdom come.* The Son has claimed humanity for His bride. She is the servant of the beast no longer; she has found her true Lord; she can see her glory in Him! “*Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*” The Spirit clothes the bride with the graces and beauties

of her Lord. Those who have nothing in themselves are able to look up to Him, and to become bright with His brightness.

III. "*And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not, I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*"

We have heard before of the voice of a great multitude. Now *he* speaks to me. Who? The prophet knows not more than we do. He is sure only that the message is a Divine one. And he is sure that it is distinct from that general chorus. It is directed to him. It must be Divine, for it tells him of that which has been the subject of all songs and prophecies since the world began. The union of Humanity with her true Husband—the overthrow of the idolatry that had separated them, and had degraded her—to this all the hopes of the creation, to this all the revelations of God, have pointed. And now some are called to celebrate this marriage. They are bidden to the bridal supper. The voice pronounces them blessed. To take part in such a celebration is to enter into fellowship with all blessed and redeemed spirits; with all that has been gracious, and pure, and noble, in the generations of earth, and in the worlds that have never known sin. May not humanity thus exalted be an object of adoration? Does not he who bears these tidings represent it? Has not hero-worship now found its justification? Has not the Son of Man destroyed the sin into which the elder ages fell? No, *see thou do it not!* The



bridal of Humanity is the vindication, not the reversal of the second, as of the first, commandment. Each man is raised by that bridal. Each man who is content to be a fellow-servant with his brethren, to take his stand among those whose nature Jesus bore, whose death Jesus died, shares His glory. But that glory is to look above humanity, as He did. The spirit of prophecy has been throughout a testimony of Him—a testimony of a Man, who is one with God; who fully asserts the name of God; in whom men may draw nigh to God.

And now He Himself appears—that Son of Man, who stood before the Prophet clothed in the robes of the High Priest, walking in the midst of the candlesticks; the same essentially, but bearing a different name, fulfilling another office.

IV. *“And I saw heaven open, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the WORD OF GOD. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* So speaks St. John at the opening of his Gospel. Those who

comment upon the sentence tell us how what they call the Logos doctrine was propagated by a Jew of Alexandria; how it was accepted by the Christian fathers in that city, in the second century; how it was connected by them, as well as by its first teacher, with thoughts derived from heathen philosophy. They then inquire whether it is likely that such a profound speculation should have reached a fisherman of Galilee?—whether it is not much more probable, that what we call his Gospel, was a compilation of doctors in a later time? All the learning which can be brought to bear upon the history of human thought must be valuable. No speculations about it need cause one the slightest anxiety. But, as I have urged upon you before, it may be very desirable to know, whether the discovery of the doctrine of gravitation can be traced to Newton or Kepler, or any earlier thinker; but it is somewhat more important to know, whether the doctrine of gravitation is true or false; whether it will explain the facts of the universe; or, whether it is only contained in a book called “The Principia.” To the like test we must bring the statements in the beginning of St. John’s Gospel. To that test they appeal. Learned doctor, thou knowest all that Philo or Origen said about the Word of God; but, if He has nothing to do with *thee*—if thou canst interpret thyself without Him—thou mayst as well let Philo, and Origen, and the wicked man who forged St. John’s name, alone! Their doctrine can be of no significance to thee, for, in that case, it is a mere fiction. The Gospel assumes, that all the light which is in thee, or in any man, proceeds from His light; that neither thou, nor Philo, nor Origen, could have used any words, or understood any words, but for this Word; that their darkness,

and mine, and every man's, arises from our refusing to own this light and to dwell in it. Supposing this to be so, it seems nowise unnatural that all prophets should speak of a Word of God as coming to them; that heathens should confess they needed such an enlightener of their hearts and reasons. Nor can it be surprising, at least to us, that a Jew of the first century, meditating on that which he believed was revealed to the prophets of his land—meditating on what he saw to be the aspirations and perceptions of men out of the circle of their covenant—should have arrived at a more definite and distinct apprehension than his predecessors, of some Being related to the Mind of God—related to the mind of man—in whom God and man might hold converse. The question of all questions is, whether this Being is really the Illuminator of *man*, or only the Illuminator of wise and select *men*? whether He was made flesh, and dwelt among men, that He might give them power to become sons of God? or, whether He was only a spiritual emanation or conception, of whom men might dream, but who could not speak to them, rule them, judge them? Supposing He were actually what St. John says He was, then, I say, the poor Galilean fisherman was exactly the person to whom we should believe, for the interests of mankind, that He would declare Himself, that so He might be shewn to be verily and indeed the Enlightener, not of those who bring their light with them but of those who confess that, left to themselves, they are blind.

And now, this Word of God, who has been declared to be the light of men—the source of good to all men, and to each man—comes forth *judging and making war*. Who else can judge but He who has been con-

versing with every heart, who knows all the passages of it, who has been carrying on His secret judgments—who has been bringing every man to His bar—every day since man began to sin? Who can make war but He who has been striving with each man, with each family, with each nation—but He, against whom every idolatrous, malicious, foul thought, and desire, and word, and deed, that has corrupted societies or individuals, has been striving? We know how dark and bloody their wars have been; history tells us of them. What we want to know is, whether all has been bloody and dark—whether all is to end in darkness and blood? Heaven is opened, and One is seen sitting upon a white horse, who is *Faithful and True*, who, in *righteousness*, judges and makes war. He sees into the heart of things. Nothing that is good, nothing that is His own creation, can escape those eyes, which are as a flame of fire, or be lost; nothing which is evil and corrupting can hide itself from them, and be saved. On His head are many crowns. We cannot measure the extent or variety of His victories. We only know that all His enemies are to be put under His feet. It is not we who have given Him His name; no man knoweth it but Himself. He knows all our names. Thanks be to God, we cannot fathom the depth of His! His vesture is dipped in blood; not in the blood of others only, but in His own. He has poured out His own blood for men. He will not spare any blood which is needful for the redemption of the earth, for the destruction of its destroyers. He does not come alone; the armies in heaven are with Him. The Son of God is the First-born of many brethren. All the sons of God have received His Spirit, are permitted to take part in

His work. And that work must be a work of justice and of vengeance. A sharp sword goes out of His mouth. The nations have felt the rod of wickedness; they must feel the rod of righteousness. The oppressor must know that there is a power more terrible than his. He has used the name of God to strengthen his purposes of fierceness and wrath; he has thought that the earth brought forth its fruits only to make him drunk: now he must know what is the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God!

V. All through this book I have been tracing the record of a mighty catastrophe, which was to conclude that age of the world. Utterly intolerable the thought of that catastrophe would be if we might not call it a judgment, if we were not told who was the Judge. It is when I have heard that the Son of Man, the Lamb who was slain, is King of kings and Lord of lords, that I can bear to read the next verses. *“And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the*

*remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh."*

There is no attempt to disguise in this passage, or in any part of Scripture, the horror and loathsomeness of a battle. We should never shrink from the steady contemplation of facts, or cover them with any seemly sentimental phrases. Those will never alter the nature of things. To endure the visible, we must learn to look into the invisible. To bear the darkness that is over the earth, the veil of the temple must be rent asunder. We can bear to hear of the flesh of men and animals being given to the birds of the air, if the result is to be that the beast and the false prophet—the military tyranny which is grinding the nations, the spiritual tyranny which is preying upon their inward being—are cast into the lake of fire. And this the prophet understands to be the meaning of that travail and anguish through which the world in his day was passing. It was the judgment upon the prince of this world; it interpreted all the judgments that had gone before. Every one had been a battle between the same powers, every one contained the pledge of that issue. Till the Word of God had been fully revealed in the incarnation of the Son of Man, in His Passion, in His return to glory, there had still been a heavy cloud over all the doings and destinies of God's creatures. The years since Adam came forth seemed to be only years of mutual destruction for his race, just as the ages before seemed to be periods of mutual destruction for the inferior races. Now, when the Head of the universe had gone through its conflict and misery, a light was thrown back upon all the past. His life



was seen to be stronger than all the powers of death which had been working in God's universe.

And so, again, the battle of that age throws a light onwards into all the battles of subsequent generations. It is hard and sickening to read of Christian men, sons of God, giving their brethren to be food to the fowls of the air; it is fearful to think for what ends the kings of the earth and the great captains have slain each other. But, doubt it not, in every one of these fights, some beastly power, some lie which has deceived the world, has been thrown down and cast into the lake of fire. Amidst all our reasons for mourning, the spirits of heaven, and those of our brethren who have fought the fight and joined them, have seen reasons for thanksgiving and triumph. Something has been done for the purification of the earth, for the fuller manifestation of the sons of God; new conquerors come from the anguish of earth, to take part in the righteous government of it; new guests come from the horrible supper of death to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; one more step is gained in the triumph of the Perfect Will over rebellious wills; one step more towards that restitution of all things which God, who cannot lie, has promised by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

## LECTURE XX.

### THE MILLENNIUM.

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away: and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was

opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.—REV. XX.

THE word “ Millennium ” raises unpleasant recollections in the minds of many cultivated persons. Some think of the Fifth Monarchy men, in our civil wars. Others are reminded of speculations which they have heard in their own days—speculations which seemed to them a curious mixture of history and fiction, supported by arguments at once ingenious and incoherent. These persons will approach this chapter, where the doctrine of a Millennium is announced, with listlessness or impatience. “ Surely,” they will be inclined to say, “ the few words that have given rise to such dreams may be passed over as the *obiter dicta* of a book which is, in itself, rather unintelligible. We are practical men ; we want the Bible for practical lessons ; if there are any people amongst us who have nothing to do, let them busy themselves in such matters.”

By all means, let us remember that we are practical men, and that the Bible is a practical book. But I cannot think that this method of setting aside passages which, for good or evil, have affected and are affecting the most earnest men and women, is practical at all. Contempt is never practical ; it is the offspring of laziness ; it involves in the end much unnecessary trouble. Questions which have been denounced as beneath our notice prove that they possess a power of which we must take heed. Opinions which we have despised in others, in their rebound strike against ourselves ; pro-

bably overthrow us, just because we had paid no regard to them. I am satisfied that this belief in a Millennium has been a practical belief in numbers of devout thinkers; that if it is, as is alleged, encompassed with fancies, maintained on insufficient grounds, that is a reason for inquiring whence it derives the strength which it certainly cannot owe to what is essentially feeble. Suppose there had been no such tradition in Christendom, no such thought hovering about the minds of men in one age and another, all of us would have been the sufferers. There would not have been less of fanaticism—that would have taken other forms; there would have been far less of hope, far less of confidence in God's promises; more of a dreary suspicion that the earth is given up to those who care only to rob and spoil it. All art, all poetry, all politics, would have been lower and more grovelling if this conception had not been haunting those to whom it presented itself in no formal and doctrinal shape, who were often the least disposed to give it entertainment.

But, as I said in reference to the word Babylon in the previous chapter, this word points not to one set of opinions, but to opposite sets of opinion. The objectors to the doctrine are not found only or chiefly among those who treat it with scorn. Numbers shrink from it, because there are positive convictions in their minds, which they suppose they must abandon before they can receive it. “We have been taught to look for a heavenly state; you want us,” they say, “to fix our hopes upon an earthly paradise. We have been looking forward to a reward which is to greet those who have served God faithfully here when they have passed the boundary of death; you point us to a blessed condition which may befall this world

generally. Supposing we could care for that general indiscriminate felicity here, does any Christian know that he shall reach the moment which is fixed for it?"

These are grave doubts—so grave in the minds of some, that they ignore or dismiss that part of Scripture which has given rise to them. I cannot hold that to be a safe course. To me it seems that the hope of good for this earth is essentially involved in all the promises of God; that we must suppress the most obvious statements in Scripture, and kill the best wishes in our own hearts, if we refuse to cherish it. I cannot think that any true belief in a Kingdom of Heaven, or in the gifts after death which God will bestow on those who love Him, would interfere in the least with the other anticipation. If they have clashed, it must have been through some confusion in our minds. And a faithful study of the actual language of the Divine book, must be the way to remove the confusion, and to bring the two into harmony.

The traditions of the early Church represent St. John in direct collision with Cerinthus, who was the champion of that notion of a reign of Christ upon earth, which identified it with a Saturnian reign, the reappearance of an Eden of outward felicity. Though there is no historical foundation for the tales which make him and the Apostle personal antagonists, they denote an instinct that their doctrines were incompatible: the one the counteraction of the other. That instinct is supported by every part of the Apocalypse. The deliverance of the earth is assuredly its subject—but the deliverance of the earth, from the sensual masters who had degraded it, by its true spiritual

Lord. That idea of a kingdom of Heaven, which has been developing itself through every part of the New Testament, now reaches its completion. The Lamb fully vindicates His right to the dominion, against the Dragon, over all God's voluntary creatures. The involuntary creatures are restored to their right place, when man is restored to his. Remember that this has been the consistent teaching of the Apocalypse hitherto, and consider the words with which this chapter opens.

I. *"And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, to shut him up, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled : after that he must be loosed a little season."*

I wish you to observe that in this passage, at all events, there is no allusion whatever to any special temporal felicity which the earth or man is to experience. Nothing is said about exemption from pain and sorrow either to individuals or nations. We have been hearing of a spiritual power, who resisted the Lamb and who was overcome by Him, and cast out of heaven. We have heard how that power was able to wage an unusually terrible, though a short war, with the inhabitants of the earth. We have heard of armies rising from the bottomless pit to second him, not by destroying trees or grass, but by tormenting the minds and hearts of men. We have heard of a beast to whom the Dragon gave his authority, and of a false prophet who wrought wonders in his name. These temporary incarnations of the Evil Spirit have been thrown down.



Now it is announced that he himself will be restrained in the exercise of that power which he has been exerting against human beings. A chain shall be put upon him. And when we ask what kind of chain, the answer is given immediately: he shall not be able to *deceive* the nations as he has done. It is a moral mischief he has been doing. He has persuaded men to believe that the Lamb is not King of kings, and Lord of lords; that the visible is mightier than the invisible; that he himself is stronger than Christ. A confession shall be borne by the nations, by those who have yielded the strongest assent to his lie, that this is not so; that the invisible is mighty over the visible; that Christ is the King, and not Satan. It is not said that his power is at an end. He may again—he will again—be set loose. But there shall be a series of years during which the reign of Christ over this planet of ours shall not only be proclaimed by a few here and there, who stand aloof from the doings of the earth, but shall make itself felt in its order, in its commonest daily transactions.

One objection, then, to this doctrine is removed by presenting the whole of it instead of merely a side of it; in the Apostle's words rather than in our own. You think that men are far too prone already to imagine a state of things in which there shall be a lazy felicity; in which all the fruits of the earth shall lay themselves at our feet, without needing the toil of heads and hands to cultivate them; in which there shall be no need of justice, government, self-sacrifice, because each thing will come to each man spontaneously. You think this dream, whether it is called a dream of heaven or of earth, has weakened thought, courage, manhood, all the virtues that are most precious to us. The Apostle

thinks with you. He declares that the Lamb who sacrificed Himself for human beings shewed forth what is the truest, highest, most celestial state. That spirit who has deceived men with thoughts of some good which is different from this, opposed to this—who has set before us a vision of selfish enjoyment—he regards as the great enemy and destroyer of the race. And the thousand years of which he tells are precisely years in which the earth shall acquire a new life, and strength, and capacity, just because men are not so much a prey to that delusion as they once were; because they have an altogether different standard set before them; because they confess themselves to be under a different law.

But can we adopt this notion of a great moral change if we suppose it to be the effect of a sudden descent of Christ to the earth? I believe, my brethren, that all this book has been telling us *how* the Apostle connected a moral change in the world with a descent of Christ to the earth. The true Lord of the world shewed Himself to the world in poverty and humiliation; in acts of mercy and power; in dying the death of the cross. That was His descent to the earth. And He that descended, also ascended that He might fill all things. Death could not hold Him. He was proclaimed to Jews and heathens as the Conqueror of death, as the Son of God, and the Giver of the Divine Spirit to men. The question whether He was so or not, was to be brought to the trial of battle. This book records the battle. Jerusalem, the capital of one division of the old world, Rome, the capital of the other division of the old world, were the fields on which it was fought. Other accounts may be given of the result. I accept this account of it: that mortal

power was shewn not to be supreme over the earth and man; that the power which is opposed to brute power was vindicated. The descent of Christ to the earth, for which all ages had been preparing, was the beginning of this triumph; if He is the Son of God, all that followed was the necessary consequence of His appearance. The thrones of the earth were shaken to their centre that thus it might be known who had the highest throne—to whom all kings of the world owed homage. This manifestation or appearing of Christ in the glory of His Father and of the angels, the Apostles looked for; this, the last of Apostles was permitted to behold through the clouds and darkness which enveloped the world in his day. But if you ask, not for a manifestation of Christ's royal glory, but for another descent like that into the manger, I can discover no traces of it anywhere; certainly not in this passage respecting the Millennium where people have most suspected it. For read the next words.

II. "*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*" Surely if one takes these words as they stand, they do not describe a descent of Christ to the earth, but an ascent of them who had been

beheaded for the witness of Christ to reign with Him. I do not believe that those who cling with the most real and deep faith to the idea of a millennium—those to whom it is a strength in their pilgrimage through the world, and a solace under the weight of its evil—would feel shaken for more than a few moments by observing this difference, startling as it looks. I am satisfied that what they really intend by a reign of Christ on earth is exactly what the Apostle intends; and that if they could give a clear account to themselves of their own thoughts and hopes, they would find that his language was far more satisfactory to them than their own. At first, it might be a far greater distress to them to suggest the thought that *they* had postponed to a remote future a millennium upon which *he* believed that the world was about to enter in his own day. And if such an interpretation of his words involved the loss of any real hope which they have entertained respecting the future of the earth or of mankind, I should be very slow to put it forward, because I should suspect its truth. I am sure that the expectations which the Bible holds out to us are brighter, not fainter, than our own; that they include all which any one has conceived; that the business of every teacher is to strengthen and deepen them, not to weaken them. But it seems to me that the passage before us not only becomes more consistent with the rest of this book, and of the New Testament generally, if we understand it of the ages during which the Gospel was establishing itself in the different parts of the Roman Empire, but that by understanding it so, the difficulty which has perplexed so many minds, about the connexion between the future state of each man after death and the future state of

the world at large, is removed, and a brilliant light thrown upon both.

That a vision of the souls who *were beheaded for the witness of Christ* must refer to those who have died, not to those who escape death, no one can dispute. What, then, would it appear to tell us? That these witnesses of Christ—who had cared so much for the earth when they dwelt upon it, who had laboured to do it good, and apparently had laboured in vain, who had told it of its true King, and of its revolt to a usurper—should, when they were no more seen, exercise an influence over it which had been denied them before; should work as the efficient servants of Him who had given up His life for the redemption of the world. This is their high reward, exactly that reward which our Lord held out to them in His parable. He that had used the pound well, and had made it five pounds, was to have dominion over five cities. He that used the two well, and made them other two, was to have dominion over two cities. No idleness, no luxurious indulgence was offered them; they would enter into the glory of their Lord; they would have the delight of knowing more and more of His purposes, of working more and more in conformity with them. They should be set free from the miserable vanity and selfishness which had clogged and disappointed their efforts here; they should understand their own spheres of labour, and co-operate with all to whom other spheres were assigned; they should live as He lives, they should work as He works, for the good of His subjects; they should judge, as He judges, between the right and the wrong, between the pure and the impure.

And here is the distinction between these true servants of God, and those who did not serve Him, but

His enemy. "*The rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished.*" No such reward was prepared for them. They had chosen the wages of sin and selfishness, and those wages were death. That is what we are told. I accept the words and those which follow them as they are written. They may interfere with some of our notions about the future. I cannot help that. It is a subject on which our understandings make all kinds of crude, ignorant guesses. If we want a revelation to scatter our darkness, let us be thankful that it is given.

"*This*," we are told, "*is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are they that have part in it.*" Who then are they that have part in it? We have heard the definition of them. It is surely one which does not *exclude* the first ages of the Christian Church. Our first and most natural thought might be that it had special reference to the times when men were *beheaded for the testimony of Jesus*. Suppose then we considered what actually took place upon the earth in the centuries which followed that in which the Apostles lived. We say ordinarily that during those centuries the Gospel made its way in countries where Greek, or Syrian, or Egyptian, or Celtic, or Gothic idolatry had prevailed before. But what do we mean by this phrase? Do we mean that one form of opinion took place of certain other forms of opinion? If we mean only this, infidels ask, and we are forced to ask ourselves, was the world better for the change? Was there not as much evil committed in the name of Christianity as had been committed in the names of the false gods? But when we have exhausted ourselves with this thought, there rises before us the clear certainty of moral good and physical changes effected in the earth, and effected



directly by Christian agency. We perceive—no startling facts on the other side, and no false candour, can help us from perceiving—that we are entering on a new stage of the history of our planet. The whole scheme of religion which had been connected with the politics, the habits, the amusements of the different nations of the earth passes away. Principles which had been contradicted in all quarters of the world, which are still at variance with its practice, gradually force themselves upon men's acceptance as truths. Much as they are set at nought, they more and more approve themselves as laws which must govern somewhere, which ought to govern everywhere. That idea of self-sacrifice which runs counter to every inclination and tendency of every human mind, enthrones itself in human minds as the effective principle, as that which can accomplish what no other accomplishes. The cross does in some marvellous way obtain a recognition from the emperors and kings who appear as if they did think and must think it to be the most contemptible of all signs. How do they come to feel its power? By trying their swords against it; by seeing whether swords and stakes will not extinguish the confession of it. Those ages therefore exactly answer to the first part of the description in this chapter. No decrees of monarchs, no acts of priests, will explain the alteration which is taking effect. It is a change at the very heart of society. The demon is forced to let go his hold over minds and spirits that had recognised him. The new life of the thousand years affects government, education, manners, the cultivation of the soil. But it proceeds silently, mysteriously, in defiance of all appearances. You must study it by the lapse of centuries to know how complete it is. You must see how

the overthrow of one established corruption after another attests the permanence of the spiritual rule under which the earth has been brought.

And what is the character of that spiritual rule? There is nothing, we sometimes say, more delusive than the dream of posthumous fame. The assertion is well founded, for every selfish anticipation is full of delusion. But is there anything more real, more undoubted, than posthumous *influence*? How it was felt in those ages we all know. The benefactor of a neighbourhood was regarded as the saint who after his death was blessing that neighbourhood. The tillage of the land is dear to him; he gives healing powers to the springs. But were not those thoughts full of superstition? Do I think that the Bible endorses such superstitions merely because they may have had certain good effects? I believe the thoughts of men about these saints and this government were full of superstition. I believe the Bible endorses no superstition. I believe no superstition has good effects, only evil effects. And for that reason I do not confound the thoughts with that to which they referred and of which they bore witness. This is the mistake of the philosophers, who talk grandly about certain ideas which prevailed in certain periods. If they mean by ideas notions and conceptions of men, they must canonise very mischievous and very dishonourable fancies under that name. If they mean by ideas—laws, principles, truths, which are not of to-day nor of yesterday, then they will admit with me that the doctrines of men about departed saints may have pointed to an actual rule which they exercised, and which men were conscious of in a number of ways, though they were quite unable to reduce it into order, and though they often made it an excuse for shameful

idolatry. For, let me repeat it again and again, this power, if it is of the same nature and quality with that from which it is derived, cannot act upon men as if they were stones, or trees, or even mere animals. It must speak to their understandings, affections, consciences; it must appeal to them as voluntary responsible creatures. May it not then be a very great help to us in studying the facts of the world's history—and among these facts, the apprehensions of men respecting themselves and the powers that were surrounding them—if we adopt the Apostle's statement simply; if we suppose that this dominion of the departed over the condition and destiny of the earth is associated by a Divine and providential link with the dominion of Him who was the first-born from the dead, the head of many brethren?

Blessed and holy indeed, if this be so, is the first resurrection, and they who partake of it. One death they have passed through in the dear might of Him whom that death could not hold. The second death, the death which overtakes the self-seeker, has no power over them as it had none over Him. His Spirit bore witness with their spirits that they were sons of God, and therefore, that their lives, in one world or another, were to be spent in the service of men. And have they not been joined by all to whom the same Spirit has taught the same lesson? Do we not know what their occupations must be? Most truly the occupations of heavenly creatures, because devoted to the succour and comforting of those who are walking and often missing their way upon earth. A light falls upon a page of a book—some one seems as if he were showing you the true sense of it. Why not he who wrote it?—he who perhaps understood his

own words but imperfectly when he set them down, but who has learnt the signification of them since. A room brings back the memory of faces that were once seen, of voices that were once heard in it—why may not those faces be looking at us; those voices be giving to us reproofs and consolations? If we thought so, we should care little for mock messages from the departed; the real would be infinitely precious and awful. If we thought so, we should indeed feel that the reign of the saints is not ended yet; though perhaps a higher reign than theirs may have been revealed to us.

For we are told of an end to the thousand years.

III. *“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”*

To those who contemplate the Millennium as the great climax of all human history, this prospect of a dark termination to it—of an overthrow of all its rare happiness—must be very appalling. They naturally shrink from the vision of Satan let loose again upon the world, of wild tribes gathered from the ends of the earth to destroy a city in which saints had established their throne. To those on the other hand, who regard this Millennium as the effect of Christ's Death, Resurrec-

tion and Ascension, of the gift of the Spirit, of His victory over Jewish and Heathen enemies, over the rebels of Jerusalem, and the tyrants in Rome—to those who look on the Millennium as a real reign of those who have believed in Christ and fought on His side, and died in His cause, over the earth which He had redeemed,—to those who look upon it as a state in which this government was making itself felt, but felt by those who were continually throwing off its yoke, misunderstanding its nature, making the acknowledgment of it an excuse for superstition and crimes; to those who take it as the true explanation of that Christendom life in death which we read of in the records of the modern world; to those who therefore regard it as something immeasurably better than the condition of the old world, still more than any condition of mere repose and enjoyment could be, but who regard it as immeasurably short of what God's redemption and His promises would lead them to hope for ultimately; the announcement of a catastrophe which would shake this order so blessed, so little confessed, is a help in the interpretation of the past, and a warrant for confidence in the future. And when we consider the nature of the calamity which is said to befall the camp of the saints and the beloved city, the intention of the prophet again comes forth into light and clearness, by the side of the notorious facts of history. What mean those wild irruptions of hordes of Huns and Avars, and of Tartar hosts under Zenghis Khan and Timour, which found a garden before them, and left a wilderness behind them? They described themselves as scourges of God; they believed they had a Divine commission. How came that thought into their minds? What had they to do? They disturbed the civilisation and order

which had been gradually establishing itself in the world; they seemed to say that there was no such thing as legal government, no sacred yoke of customs and traditions. Mere force of numbers, mere strength of arm, apart from all that had converted multitudes and swords into ministers of order, appeared to be again proving itself supreme. Yes! and why? That nations which had sunk into a monotony of customs, laws, traditions; which had forgotten how these had established themselves, and what gave them their stability and authority; which had perverted civilisation into mere indulgence, and the belief of an invisible world into a mere tool for maintaining the corruption and tyranny of the visible; that these nations might be roused to remember what they were and whence they had fallen; that they might know by bitter experience, that selfishness is the author, not of government, but of Anarchy; that the forms and graces and blessings of civil life are not to be sacrificed to the Devil, as if they came from him, but are to be laid on God's altar, because they are His. Satan is let loose in the strictest sense of the word, that Satan may be overthrown. That dominion of the upper world over the lower is set at naught that men may see how real it is, and what a falsehood society becomes when it ignores the relation between those two worlds, and tries to constitute an earth which shall be self-sufficing.

That, I conceive, has been the great crime of men from the beginning. That it was of which the Tower of Babel gave the precedent; that it was of which all the despotisms of the old world were the development; that it is which has made the Church of Christ, the beloved city of the later ages, fouler and more debased



than the Jerusalem of the earlier ages. That the attempt to put a visible hierarchy in place of an invisible, is denounced in the most terrible sentences of this book, I believe as strongly as those do who would merely change Babylon into papal Rome, or who would deny that there has been a Church of Christ—a Communion of Saints, except in some small and scattered communities; which Churches must be invested with an ideal purity, such as belonged to none of those that we read of in the apostolical letters.

Take Babylon to represent an evil principle of society which manifested itself again and again in the old world, and has manifested itself again under more fearful and complicated conditions in the new; take the holy city to be indeed the Christendom of which we and of which all the baptized nations are members; take the millennial state to represent that new kingdom into which we have been brought; and then all the calamities that have befallen mankind from the invasions of the wild Gog and Magog hordes that lie on the outskirts of civilisation, and from the mobs that have been left untended in particular lands, contain the most fearful lesson and warning for us. And yet they contain also the blessed promise, that the borders of the holy city shall be expanded to receive those very races that have threatened its existence; and that Satan, the common deceiver of all times and all lands, shall at length be cast into the lake of fire, to which the beast and the false prophet, the tyrannical and idolatrous systems of the old world, have been already consigned.

And so we are prepared for the vision with which this chapter closes.

IV. "*And I saw a great white throne, and him that*

*sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."*

A great white throne, and He that sat upon it, before whom *heaven and earth* fled away, and there was no place for them. Remember, it was *heaven* as well as *earth*. If you suppose that these words speak of a destruction of the earth you must suppose that they speak of a destruction of the heavens. If one meaning is impossible, do not contradict all that we have been reading and hearing in this book by imagining the other. Yet the vision is strictly true. In the vision of God Himself all things must disappear; saints who govern, as much as those who are governed. In that perfect light all alike seem lost, *no place is found for them*. And yet it is that very light which brings all into manifestation. Each one, small and great, stands out clearly and distinctly when He is revealed. Vague thoughts haunt us of great judgments upon the world at large in which we individually are forgotten. Or we are indifferent about the world, thinking of ourselves and what will happen to us. In this Divine light there is no such confusion. God loves the world. How can we separate ourselves from it? God has made each

of us a conscious being. How can we lose that being in the vastness of any society? It is a judgment between life and death. Hast thou chosen life? hast thou chosen death? That question reaches every man, whether he has been buried in the sea or in the grave. It reaches, so St. John says, into the very depth of hell. And life, he says, conquers. Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire.

Does that mean, my brethren, that by some change of circumstances, by some arbitrary decree of God, evil ceases to bring its curse and doom; that some time commences when God no longer judges? I can form no conception which is so frightful as that. Evil can never be less accursed, till good becomes less blessed. Asking God not to judge, is asking utter destruction to ourselves. The victories of God are victories over the will of men. You and I can only be saved from curses and punishments by being saved from sin. God sent His Son to deliver us from that. If death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, it is because He has done His work; because He has seen of the travail of His soul, and been satisfied.

## LECTURE XXI.

### THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write : for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things ; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone : which is the second death. And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God : and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal ; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel : on the east three gates ; on the north three gates ; on the south three gates ;

and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth : and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper : and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper ; the second, sapphire ; the third, a chalcedony ; the fourth, an emerald ; the fifth, sardonyx ; the sixth, sardius ; the seventh, chrysolite ; the eighth, beryl ; the ninth, a topaz ; the tenth, a chrysoprasus ; the eleventh, a jacinth ; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls ; every several gate was of one pearl : and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it : and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day : for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie ; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.—REV. xxi.

BEFORE the vision of the great white throne and Him that sat upon it, heaven as much as earth had fled away. In that perfect light, there seemed for a while no place for the spiritual more than the material world. But soon that glory, which had thrown all into shade, brought each thing into full manifestation. The dead, small and great, stood forth ; the sea gave up her dead ; the thoughts of every man's heart came into judgment. He knew what he was. Death and life stood out in dreadful contrast. And death and hell

*“were cast into the lake of fire; this is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”*

Those last words strike one as a very terrible conclusion to the vision. I believe they are very terrible; and yet, taken in connection with those which precede, they contain, it seems to me, an infinite comfort. Death and hell import a separation from God, a denial and contradiction of God. The bottomless pit is Atheism; the state of being without God. Here we are told that these are conquered by Him; they are cast into the lake of fire. That lake of fire is regarded no longer as out of His dominion, beyond the circle of His grace and love. It is His, to be used for His Divine purposes. What those are we have been hearing throughout this book—throughout the Bible, of which it is the climax. Our first thought is that whosoever is not found written in the book of life—whosoever has chosen death instead of life—must continue for ever in that condition. Reasoning upon the nature of a spirit, arguing about its immortality, I can find no escape from that conclusion, though I feel that it withers my energies as well as my hope. The revelation of God gives me that which all my speculations cannot give. I know that He can act upon spirits; I know that He can and does raise them out of death. I know that the process of rising out of death into the consciousness of life, is and must be an agonising one. I know that when a prodigal is coming to himself, his conscience passes through a fire of which none but God knows the intensity, though *he* knows something of it. If I am told that whosoever hath not life is not left in that utter wretchedness, but is cast into a lake of fire—if I am



told that death, hell, and whatever divides us from God is cast into the same lake—may I not accept that as a message from above, which meets all the wants, fears, longings of my heart? Must I set up the miserable measure of my own intellect against the word of God, merely because it brings me, as it always does, the divinest consolation, in the midst of the divinest warnings?

The argument that such hope gives a dangerous encouragement to wrong-doers, I am not careful to answer. The same charge has been urged in all days against the doctrine that man is justified by faith, and not by his own deeds or deservings—truly urged if the faith is not in a living God, who delivers the conscience from the guilt, and burden, and power of sin—if it is in a God, who merely remits the just and merciful punishment of sin. God can take care of His own cause; we take very ill care of it. Left to ourselves, we should always cheat men of a Gospel, lest it should make them careless of the Law. And we receive the due reward of our dishonesty. They are not able to keep the Law. The terror of it has no power to make them obey it, only to make them hate it. They begin to keep the commandment when they trust Him who has given it, when they own that He is working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. Diminish that trust in any wise; lead men to think that God is not the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; that a time will come when He will change as we change; and just so far you are doing the devil's work. Your clever, worldly calculations do not make us better, but more indifferent, more desperate.

There is another assertion of far greater force, if taken rightly. We are often told that we must apply the

same measures to the blessedness of the righteous, which we apply to the misery of the wicked. Yes, and not only to the degrees of blessedness and misery, but to the kind and quality of each. If we suppose the misery to be merely material, we shall suppose the blessedness to be merely material. If we suppose the misery to be spiritual, we shall suppose the blessedness to be spiritual. If we do not exactly tell ourselves what we mean in the one case, we shall fall into the same vagueness respecting the other. If we suppose all material misery to be an instrument in God's hand for the deliverance of men out of the greater and more terrible spiritual misery, we shall suppose all material blessedness to be the result of spiritual blessedness. And so we shall be able to enter upon this twenty-first chapter, respecting the new heaven and the new earth. For we shall understand the old heaven to be that which we conceive when our meridian is on earth. And we shall understand the new heaven and the new earth to be both seen as they are seen in the light of God; the heavenly or spiritual as the substance, the earthly as the form or body which has been redeemed to its true subjection, which is able to manifest the glory that it once concealed. Think how the earth presented itself to a heathen of the old world. His own land was the one dear cherished spot in the midst of it—all were contemplated in reference to that. The earth was composed of a number of different countries, each with a different soil, different customs, different laws, a different language, and different worship. Then think of the heaven! There dwelt the objects of those worships, the beings to whom the soil owed its richness or its barrenness, who were the sources of the diversities of customs, laws, languages. And this is the natural way

of judging about Heaven and Earth. Do not call it heathenish ; it is yours and mine. We start from what is nearest to us. What lies beyond we judge and measure by that standard. But we are driven to own something which we cannot see, and yet which has dominion over us, which affects us in a thousand ways. What it is we must guess of. The things we see, especially those objects over our heads which influence all we do in such marvellous ways, give a form to our guesses. The heaven is felt to be before the earth ; yet the earth appears to be before the heaven. How can we descend from the unknown to the known, merely because the unknown appears to be the original? Must we not ascend from the known to the unknown?

The Jew was taught that he could not judge of the infinite by the finite, of the original by the image. The unseen God spoke to Abraham ; the *I AM* unveiled Himself to Moses. The care of the land, the laws, customs, sacrifices of the chosen people were grounded on that revelation: Heaven in all things claimed precedence of the earth, the government of the earth. But could man be satisfied with this discovery of a Name, even of a Government? If he was the image of Him who bore that Name, who exercised that Government, must he not behold his Original, must he not meet with Him? The revelation which Apostles declared to be the necessary sequel to, and fulfilment of, that to the family of Abraham—which the Jewish rulers and priests rejected—purported to be this. It purported to meet the demands of the Gentiles, whose thoughts had risen from earth towards heaven, in search of their Ruler, no less than of the Jew, who had confessed that the Ruler of heaven was making Himself known to earth. If that were so—if it were true that the Son of Man, who came

down from heaven, ascended up to heaven, and even when upon earth was in heaven—there was in very deed a new Heaven and a new Earth; and the Spirit of God might enable the purified eye of man's spirit to behold them.

Such a vision was vouchsafed to the last Apostle, for his own sake and for ours. It was the result and reward of all those visions of conflict which had preceded. That divided heaven of the old world had passed away. The narrow heaven of the Jew, which was still mixed with earth, and yet separate from earth, had passed away. It was the Heaven of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—of God dwelling in His own perfect light—manifesting Himself to all in the Divine Word; quickening with His own Spirit. Perfect distinctness; perfect unity. Every Apostle was appointed to bring out some aspect of the mystery. St. Paul, when he was carried to the third heaven, could but wonder and adore, not utter, what he had seen. But it came forth to sustain him in his own weakness; he could speak it in broken words, when he cried, "*Of him, and to him, and through him are all things, to whom be glory for ever;*" when he preached at Athens "*of him whom they were feeling after, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he was not far from any one of them, since in him they lived, and moved, and had their being;*" more clearly when he "*bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the family of heaven and earth is named,*" asking "*that he would grant to the Ephesians that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they might be rooted and grounded in love; that they might know with all saints what is the height, and*

*length, and breadth, and might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge;*" and when, having made this wonderful petition on their behalf, he committed them to Him who could do "*exceedingly abundantly for them above all that they could ask or think.*" You see how, in this act of adoration, heaven and earth inevitably met together; how impossible it was for St. Paul to enter into the glory of the higher, without seeing a new glory resting upon the lower. And it was an earth, in which there was *no more sea*; no more necessary separation of kindreds, and tribes, and tongues; yet no confused intermingling of them in a huge Babel despotism. Pentecost had established that fellowship which Babel had counterfeited. All were one in the true Head of the body. One Spirit broke down the barriers of language, so far as they destroyed the intercourse of spiritual beings, and upheld the variety of tongues, so far as they were witnesses for distinct gifts and vocations, for distinct apprehensions of the one Truth, for the different culture which God had assigned to different portions of His Vineyard. And now, therefore, at length:

I. "*I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and shall be their God.*" John had seen the old Jerusalem—the dear city of his fathers, the witness for the living God to men—vanish in flame and smoke. Behind it and within it was this other Jerusalem; the old walls and battlements had fallen down, that it might be revealed. Not a material city standing upon earth;

yet associated with the earth as that had never been; because descending from God out of Heaven; because in very deed the city of God; because representing humanity in its true redeemed, bridal condition; united to its everlasting Husband: shining with His brightness. The name Emmanuel, which was pronounced in the cradle of the Child that was King of the Jews, was fulfilled. God was indeed with men. The New Covenant is a reality, and not a dream. God has truly said to man in His Son, "I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters. And your sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

II. *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are faithful and true. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."*

We are all too ready to separate the different portions of this passage from each other. The thought of deliverance from pain, and sorrow, and death, is very delightful. Without having felt any intense pain, without having seen death very close to ourselves, we yet think that if we could be rid of them we should have the blessedness we are seeking for. Those who have endured intense pain, who have realised a little of the horror of death, want something more. Why has the pain been sent them? Why has death been permitted?



They feel that pain is intolerable if it is not a discipline ; if it is not designed to make them conscious of their own spiritual existence, to make them covet treasures which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. The words about pain, and sorrow, and death, derive their force for them from this assurance that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall behold an everlasting Friend and Deliverer. HE shall comfort them. This is the great change which they look for. Freedom from pain because it has done its work and led them to the source and centre of joy. Freedom from death because they are brought into fellowship with Him in whom is eternal life. In His presence, all things become new ; for by His presence all things are restored to their true state ; all things are beheld not marred, distorted, divided, but healthy, perfect, harmonious in their Divine Head. *I am Alpha and Omega* is the first note of the Revelation ; *I am Alpha and Omega* must be the closing note of it. The loss of the Son as the ground of all things, the loss of the Son as the goal and consummation of all things, has brought the earth into darkness, confusion, death. Those who see Him to be the head and end of creation see it as God sees it—see it without sorrow, or pain, or death. They have given up their independence ; that is death. They receive continually fresh streams from God ; there is the fountain of life. They have overcome their desire to be anything in themselves ; anything apart from God ; they are content to receive all from God, and to find all in God ; so they inherit all things. But they can never rise to a higher blessedness than that which was accorded to them when the Gospel was first preached to them, than that which was assured to them in their baptism—“ *I will be their God, and they shall*

*be my sons.*” This state of filial adoption by Him that sits on the throne is the highest state which human beings can reach. Christ died, and rose, and ascended, that it might be ours; when we fully enter into it, we receive the highest bliss of heaven. But this is also the highest bliss of earth. It is taken out of the hands of its murderer. It becomes what its Creator intended it to be.

III. *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”*

All blessedness—oh! when shall we understand this?—consists in the acknowledgment of that which is; all misery and damnation in the denial of it. That men disbelieved the good and gracious God to be their Father—that they count Him not their Father, but their enemy—this makes them cowards; this makes them traffickers with impure and evil spirits; this makes them corrupters and destroyers of each other’s purity; this makes them trifle with each other’s life; this makes them worshippers of visible things; this is the lie of which all other lies are the offspring. Those spirits which reject truth, which feed on a lie and live in a lie, are in the lake of fire. There is no way of describing their condition but that. A fire is burning in them which nothing can quench. As I said before, if we look at this fire merely as reason, without Revelation, looks at it, we could find in it only despair. When God enters, despair ceases. He is called in Scripture the God of Hope. That which we think of as His must give us hope.

IV. For see. *“There came unto me one of the seven*

*angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying*”—What new doom is this angel about to speak of? His office has been to scatter plagues. What is to be the consummation of them?—“*Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.*” Here is the consummation of the plagues. To this result have they all been tending. By them the bride has been disciplined and prepared for her Lord; by them have her seducers been tormented and cast down.

V. What this bride is we have heard already. “*And he carried me away to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.*”

Brethren, I believe that we read these words and those which follow them in our childhood; that then they make a profound impression upon us; that it seems to disappear; that we begin to regard them as Oriental poetry, which has nothing to do with the business of life; that holding that opinion, we dismiss them angrily, as if they were setting before us a phantom world which can never kindle our longings or affect our lives; but that, nevertheless, unknown to ourselves, these early impressions do come back to us in the midst of crowded cities and the hum of earthly voices. When we contrast them for a moment with what we see about us, we begin to suspect that that is the phantom world, that they may testify of the real; that that is of to-day, that this is the permanent and unchangeable; that that addresses itself to our eyes and ears; that this reveals to us the proper home of us to whom those eyes and ears belong—the home in which we are created to dwell—towards which the

hearts within us are striving, away from which we must be weary and restless. Oh! that God would give us grace so to think of that city which the Apostle saw descending out of heaven from God! And I believe that He will. I believe that the more we read the history of the world, and see what politics men have tried to form for themselves, and what promise of good—what real good—there has been in them, and what disappointment; how each one has recognised some Divine power as at work for its origin and its preservation, how each has asked that power to sustain the truth of its members and the unity of the whole society, and yet what falsehoods have been propagated in the attempt to make these invisible influences bear upon the visible doings of men; how old societies have fallen through weakness, and those which have risen up in their places have been obliged to ask help from the traditions which they had cast aside; how great experiments for freedom have terminated in cruel tyrannies; how men have talked of great ideals and held to them with earnest faith, and then sighed because the ideal was not real; how the nations of the earth and the Church of God are alike split into factions, each faction envying and hating the other; how yet the attempts at unity appear to be worse than the sect animosities which they would extinguish; the more, I say, we dwell on these spectacles, the more will this vision of an eternal city, grounded upon the union of God with man, dawn upon us through the mists of the past, through the confusions of the present, through our faint flickering expectations of what may be in the future; the more shall we be sure that God has revealed to us that which has been, and is, and must be—that which reconciles all ideals—that which binds

the ideal to the actual—that which the world, and the flesh, and the devil are ever trying to shut out from us—that which they never have been able to shut out from us; because He who is for us, He with whose name we are sealed, the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, He the God blessed for ever, is stronger than those who are against us.

Yes, dear friends, our baptism was in very deed the witness to us that we are one and all citizens of this new Jerusalem. And we may continually ask the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may know what is the hope of our calling, what is the greatness of our inheritance. And this illumination will come to us through all the turmoils and trials which make us feel the want of it. In hours of unutterable darkness, we shall remember that there is a *“light like unto a jasper stone, clear as crystal;”* that this light dwells in God Himself, and is able to fill the hearts and spirits of men. When we are meditating on the weakness and insecurity of all material barriers and protections, the thought of *that wall, great and high*, which surrounds the Divine City, will scatter all cowardly fears, will assure us that that can be in no peril. When in the poverty and helplessness of those who appear to be the champions of Christ upon earth, we cry for invisible friends and helpers, the *twelve gates with the twelve angels* will rise before us, as no imaginary, but a most real revelation. When we feel that it is very grievous to be separated from the past, to have left its living treasures far behind us, we are reminded that *“on these gates are names written, which are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”* When we ask if then we are

to be brought once more to the narrowness of the old Jewish polity, which only met men on one side of their lives, which is national, not universal, we are told that in the new Jerusalem "*there are on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, on the west three gates.*" When we fancy that the Church of the elder days, the Church which we read of in the New Testament, is hopelessly divided from the Church of our own day, this cheering message comes to us,—"*And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.*"

Everywhere we find divines going about with measuring reeds to ascertain how far the city of God reaches. Each school and sect has its own reed; each makes the limits narrower. It is some satisfaction to know that this task is superfluous; that it was undertaken long ago, by competent hands; that this was the result of it.

VI. "*And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.*" That measure of a man, which is not derived from his fallen nature, but from his angelic nature, is God's measure. The city which lieth foursquare is His city. He knows the measure of it. Perhaps we shall be wiser and safer if we do not make much use of our reeds.

But it is when we think of the materials of which our human fellowship is composed that we are likely



to feel most despair. We see the corrupt doings of other men ; we find a deep root of corruption in ourselves. In stones which we dug up from the quarries of earth, what can we expect but continual mouldering and decay ? Nothing else, if they are only dug out of the quarries of the earth. But men are not children of the earth, they are children of the light ; children of God. When they know that, when they turn to the light, when they receive His brightness and show it forth, then this is the description of them, and of the society which they form.

VII. *“And the building of the wall of it was of jasper : and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper ; the second, sapphire ; the third, a chalcedony ; the fourth, an emerald ; the fifth, sardonyx ; the sixth, sardius ; the seventh, chrysolite ; the eighth, a beryl ; the ninth, a topaz ; the tenth, a chrysoprasus ; the eleventh, a jacinth ; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were of twelve pearls ; every several gate was of one pearl, and the street of the city was of pure gold, as it were transparent glass.”*

We hear sometimes of the wealth and prodigality of Nature ; of her innumerable forms ; of her beauties of colour and light, which seem as if they had no eye to look upon them. That wealth and prodigality can cause us no mourning. They can only encourage us to meditate on the infinite love which has produced this variety of life. But have you never groaned over the wealth and prodigality of human gifts, which seem truly to be cast away ? Religious men have seen the waste, and have tried to reduce all things to a safe dulness and uniformity. All beautiful talents are abused

and perish; why not hide them in the earth? Is not that the way to keep them safe for the hard Master? Oh! think of God's City! Each human character, each human talent is a distinct pearl, of which He would build it, with which He would adorn it. Nothing that He has given can be lost: all is for use, and grace, and delight. All is meant to reflect a portion of His glory. Only remember that we are nothing in ourselves; that we are created in His image, and then you will know how each precious stone shall contribute to the glory of the whole; how the purest human gold shall be like transparent glass, through which the Divine beauty discovers itself.

VIII. But what has succeeded to that temple in the old Jerusalem, the destruction of which was the sign that the age was ended? This has been the question of Christendom in every century since its fall. Can we not have some temple in some city of the earth which shall be like that, or which is the same essentially? Cannot we have some earthly city which shall be like the Divine City—the capital of the new world as that was of the old?

This was the question of the early ages, of the middle ages: it is the question which must be settled in ours. The miseries of division are patent; it is obvious to most thoughtful men that none of the little sect cities which men have built is the city which lieth foursquare, the city whose length is as large as the breadth—that all these compounded into one can never make such a city. They therefore ask, "Has there not been a Christian polity in this earth which had a centre? Shall we not attach ourselves to that?" And I know no answer but this,—“Oh! yes; in God's name let us attach our-

selves to that polity which has a Centre. Or rather let us believe that we are attached to it already. For this is the Divine description of it: *‘And I saw no temple there, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.’* These are the centres of the society; from them its worship and sacrifices begin; in them they terminate. Whensoever we inwardly understand this to be so—when we confess that it has always been so, only that men have denied it, and put their own notions and fancies between them and heaven, and tried to separate heaven and earth which God has made one—then will the remaining words of the chapter also be accepted in their fulness. *“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the Lord God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”* Just as truly as the sun and moon give light to the visible earth, just as truly in the Lord God and the Lamb is the light of Man the appointed lord of that earth. The Church has existed, and does exist, to bear witness of that truth; to declare that God is light, that in Him there is no darkness at all; to declare that Christ is the Light of the world, that “His life is the light of men.” Because she has borne that witness so imperfectly, because she has denied that God is light, and has intercepted His light, and has made herself the sun instead of Him, the nations of the earth which have been within the range of her influence, have been cold and dark when they might have been dwelling in the full blaze of truth and love. But the words are still true, and shall one day prove themselves true: *“And the nations of the earth which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth shall bring*

*their glory and honour into it."* And this because "*the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there.*" And this because "*there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*"

## LECTURE XXII.

### THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly: and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and

whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly ; Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.—  
REV. xxii.

THE last chapter of the Apocalypse has often been compared with the second chapter of Genesis. There is ground for the comparison. But, as I endeavoured to shew you in a former sermon, the ground is not this, that the last Revelation in the Bible is the Revelation of a return to the state of which it spoke in the beginning. The man formed out of the dust of the ground, who became a living soul, has eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All the members of his race have been eating of it ever since. And the evil has worked out its natural results—strife, degradation, death. And God, the true God, has been presenting Himself to the knowledge of His creatures ; and those creatures, so far as they have known Him, have been able to rise above the evil, and to perceive that they were created for fellowship, for continual improvement, for eternal life. Following the tendencies of their separate, individual, Adam nature, they have realised the full meaning of the curse ; they have sunk into themselves ; in the



midst of society they have been solitary. Claiming their rights as made in the image of God, they have found a second Adam, who is not a living soul, but a quickening spirit. They have left the garden with all its delights as a condition fit for babyhood, not for mature age. They have perceived that labour is better than enjoyment; the conquest of the thorn and the thistle than the eating of all things that are good for food, and pleasant to the sight. They have learned that the way to the tree of life is through death; that when it takes the form of the Cross, the flaming sword cannot keep any sinful mortal from approaching it. They see the river which watered the garden converted into a river of the water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

All then is progress. There is no revulsion to that primitive condition which we in our weakness and godlessness dream over and regret. God has been educating His creatures from the beginning by material things, by signs and sacraments, by the experience of toil and sorrow, by the anguish of sin, by the horror of death, to understand that they were born for an inheritance, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away—for a kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and truth. The son of Zebedee was one of the appointed instruments in carrying on this education. He was taught how all things were created by the Word, for in Him was life; how He came to baptize with the Holy Ghost; how those who would see His kingdom must be born of water and of the Spirit; how He would be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that those who believed in Him might not perish, but might have everlasting life; how He would give the living water, of which those who tasted

should not thirst again; how it would be in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life; how they that thirsted might come to Him and drink; how, when He said this, He spake of the Spirit which they that believed on Him should receive after He was glorified.

I. Those who consider these passages in St. John's Gospel, those who connect them with all that is said of eternal life in his Epistles, will be prepared for the first words of this chapter. That which was shown to John before was not a garden, but a city, the city of God; that society of men and of angels, that union of heaven and earth, which has been presented to us under the name of the new Jerusalem. And now, when we return to the symbols of Eden, it is that we may be reminded that as mere symbols they have passed away; that we have come to the realities which were denoted by them. "*He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*" We have not to find the equivalents for this language; St. John himself has translated it. We know that the Spirit who proceedeth from the Father and the Son is this River of Life. We know that it does not nourish trees, and seeds, and flowers, but the hearts, and wills, and reasons of human beings, the mystical body of Christ. And lest there should be any doubt of this, we are immediately recalled to the city. "*In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*"

The river of life is that which quickens, invigorates, unites a society of men, made to partake of God's

likeness. The tree of life is He whom they behold, He in whom they see the perfection of their own estate, He from whom all vital power descends upon them. St. John has been explaining to us, throughout his Epistle and Gospel, how the Son of God is the Source of those different graces which all have received, grace for grace; who distributes His twelve manner of fruits in the proportions and at the times which are suitable to the characters and circumstances of each society or each man; who overshadows with His leaves those to whom the taste of the fruits is unknown; who makes all the outward ministrations of His Gospel and Church serviceable for the cure of the miseries which selfishness has inflicted upon the nations.

II. *“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.”*

Not because men eat bread by the sweat of the brow are they cursed, but because they are under another government than that of God and the Lamb—because they have yielded themselves to tyrants who separate them from the true Master. Where the throne of God and the Lamb is there is no curse. When men understand that this is the kingdom in which they are living; when they are permitted to know what He is—to behold Him, to be like Him—there is no curse. Christ has taken it away. Christ has bound the children for ever to their Father in Heaven. Again, therefore, I say, brethren, we are not reading of some city to be set up at some distant day on this planet—we are not reading of a city in some other planet—we are reading of that of which Christ is the Ruler,

and therefore of which all in every place who confess Him are citizens. We may have a very imperfect apprehension of its nature; that we are to pray God by His Spirit of revelation to deepen and expand; we or others may not admit that there is any such city at all; that unbelief we are to ask that the same Spirit will take away. But the truth of things is not altered by our judgment of them. The Apostle was shewn that which is; not that which is not. The muddy vesture of decay, which hinders us from knowing what surrounds us and what we are, was taken from him; and what was disclosed was not some mansion for him, but that Father's house with many mansions which has been opened to us, and in which we are all invited to dwell.

III. "*And there shall be no night there; and they shall need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*"

I have referred you to a few of those familiar sentences in which the Evangelist St. John speaks of Christ as the Life and the Giver of Life. I need scarcely remind you of those at least as numerous in which he speaks of Him as the Light of Man, as the Light of the World, as the Light that shineth in darkness, which the darkness had not comprehended. All his other teaching is connected with this. The condemnation of sin is, that light is come upon the world, and that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. He who bore witness of the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world, is said to have been he who bore witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. Our Lord heals the blind man because He is the Light of the World. His charge

against the Pharisees is that they will not confess themselves blind that they may receive His light. How consistent with this language is that of the text! Where the Son of God and the Lamb is, there is no night. Those who are actually confessing that throne, and kneeling before it, are not in darkness, but in a full noonday. When any human creature is able to scatter any cloud from his neighbour's sky, to show him his path more clearly across the earth—when ever the moral world is purified of any of the mists that make it dismal—when the physical world gives up any of its secrets to the humble and faithful seeker—there is a pledge that the visions of this book are not delusive. And the more thoroughly we become convinced that they are not delusive—the more we act as if God's throne was set up amongst us, and as if we might turn to Him with the assurance that He does not wish us to dwell in darkness, but to see the light of life—the more shall we pass beyond the night circle ourselves, and bring fallen men out of it; the more shall we persuade them that they do not want the candle or the sun, though they may be thankful for both; that whatever brightness comes from either, He sends it, and that we may receive it from Him through whatever medium it is transmitted to us. Why does he add the announcement, "*they shall reign for ever and ever?*" Is it not because there is an essential, inseparable association between light and dominion? The sun and the stars were the dynasts of the old Eastern sages; they are so of the English peasant. Oh, that sages and peasants might learn how much grander and nobler *they* are than the most glorious objects they can gaze upon! Oh, that they might believe that the Light which made the outside

orbs shine, can shine inwardly in their hearts and reason! That when it does shine, and they are content that it should, they have an imperishable, ever-increasing royalty! The kingdom of darkness must pass away; the kingdom of light is that which Christ established when He rose out of the grave.

IV. "*And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true; and the Lord God hath sent his angel, to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.*"

Often before we have met with this testimony. These "*sayings are faithful and true.*" Why should such repetitions be necessary? We may all know why they are necessary. You and I are continually tempted to think that these are not faithful and true sayings. We suspect that they belong to a region that is at least half fantastic; we do not accept them as explanations of the parables of the world, but as themselves parables. And we adopt this opinion the more readily, because, in the midst of those solemn assertions, others occur which we suppose cannot be taken literally. "*These things must shortly come to pass. Behold, I come quickly.*" It has been my great object in these sermons to shew that such sayings also are faithful and true; that if we only read them together with the rest, the apparent contradiction in them will vanish. The old Jerusalem did not pass away till the new was revealed. All things from the beginning of the world had been advancing towards the revelation of Him in whom heaven and earth are united. That is the revelation which was vouchsafed to the Apostle John; to be as he says it was, a blessing to the men of



his own day, and not less a blessing to men of all subsequent days. Those who kept it would understand what was implied in the earlier movements of the world—they would understand what was implied in the crises and agonies through which they were passing. Yea more, they would accept the Divine kingdom which God had set up among men; they would walk in the light of it; they would not invent any miserable counterfeit of it; they would not rend it in pieces. If they "*did not keep the saying of the prophecy of this book,*" if they regarded these sayings as idle tales, or projected them into an imaginary future, they would be at the mercy of impostors who would try to do for the world what God had not done; of dividers who would say that His Church is only the creation of human artificers, and which, therefore, human artificers may throw down; of unbelievers who should maintain that He takes no care of His own earth; of tyrants who should say that what He has neglected they may trample down at their pleasure.

V. "*And I John saw these things, and heard them.*" The language of the senses is the only real language—the only language—which presents spiritual things to us as they are, not modified and disturbed by our understandings, not as if our perceptions of them were the grounds of their existence. So it has been throughout the Scriptures; the lesson is brought home to us in this its closing passage. And there is another which we need as much. The Bible has been throughout a testimony against idolatry—a testimony, at the same time, of every man's proneness to idolatry. We talk of Semitic races which had some special inclination for the worship of the invisible. The teachers of that branch of the Semitic race which bore the

most weighty and enduring protest against the worship of the visible, declare that their countrymen were ready to fall into it at every moment. The old Jewish Apostle, seeing and hearing the divinest truths, entering into the heart of the spiritual world, assures us twice that the temptation had not been overcome in him. "*And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not : for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book : worship God.*"

Triumphant and secure Protestant!—thou who spurnest idolatry, and tramplest upon those who fall into it—did it ever occur to thee that thou mightest not be wholly beyond the reach of a danger which pursued to the last the beloved disciple? Did it ever strike thee that He might say to thee, Judge not, that thou be not judged; be not high-minded, but fear.

Here, as I observed in a former chapter, there is no apparent change of persons. It is not by formal sentences and words that we are taught to distinguish the angel from Him who sent the angel. God Himself enabled the prophet to distinguish; it is He who enables us to distinguish.

VI. "*And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book : for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*"

The Apostle was forbidden to lay up his prophecy

as if its contents were for another age, and not for his age. "*The time was at hand.*" I do not wish to insist upon the assertion more than he insists upon it; when he is taught that he ought to draw our attention to it, we must listen. The evidence of its fulfilment would not depend upon those who should understand and receive it. The Judge's voice would make itself heard; the unjust and the filthy, the righteous and the holy, would hear it. How would they shew that they had heard it? The unjust will be unjust still. The sentence would go forth—"Thou hast chosen thy path, abide in it. Thou lovest wickedness: feel and know what wickedness is. Thou lovest the right, the pure, the good; feel and know what the right, the pure, and good, is."

When the light of the world shines fully forth, then will each man be found to have the thing for which he has toiled. The wages of sin, the gift of God—each will be received in its fulness. We are continually fancying that there will be some reversal of that law; that somehow we shall not reap what we have sown. The delusion hangs about us all; we try to persuade ourselves that God's grant of pardon is a warrant for it. God does more than pardon in our poor sense of that word. He gives repentance. All our experiments to measure and confine that grace of His are weak and impious. But it is the grace of turning us from darkness to light, not the cruel mercy of permitting us to go on in darkness, not the impossible mercy of giving us the blessing of a light which we hate. Good and evil were set before man at the first; they are set before him to the last. The Divine will has been acting from the first upon man's will, that he might choose the good and reject the evil. We pray

—Christ prays—that that will may prevail altogether. But so long as there is resistance to it, so long there is misery. There has been no change in the Divine order; no conversion of any one thing into its opposite. We are reading of a revelation, not of a scheme. God is bringing all contrasts into manifestation, just as He is bringing all that He has created into harmony.

VII. For the old burden of the prophecy returns once more,—“*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.*” The Revelation to St. John is the revelation of a Person who has been, and is, and is to be; of Him who is the living centre of God’s universe; of Him in whom past, present, and future meet. Does such a revelation carry us away into some transcendent region far away from our common tasks and duties? Hear the next words.

VIII. “*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*”

Those who remember God’s commandments to do them; those that live day by day as if they were under the government of a gracious Father, and as if He were working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure; those who are eschewing their own evil, and turning to Him as the source of all good; they obtain power over the tree of life. The language of the Apostle is stronger than the more ambitious language which our translators have substituted for it. In one sense, all have a right to the tree of life, seeing that Christ has been set forth as the Life of the world; seeing that He has pro-

claimed Himself in death the deliverer from death. What we want is, not to assert a right, but to acquire a capacity for tasting and enjoying the fruits of the tree. We want the power to give up craving for that which is our own, the power of ceasing to eat the fruits which grow upon our own poor stock. This power is obtained in the daily discipline of sorrow; in the effort to do the thing which has to be done; in the struggle not to do the things which the evil nature is prompting us to do. For there is a continual warning of what it will have us do. Around the best man who is striving to live as a citizen of God's city live those who refuse to be citizens of it, who prefer to be animals, who like lying better than truth. And he who keeps God's commands, cannot say, with the Pharisee, "*I thank thee that I am not one of these.*" He is continually taught that he has in him all which has degraded them into dogs or sorcerers. It is only by turning to the tree of life, taking in the food of its fruits, and enjoying the shade of its leaves, that he can overcome these temptations; or hope for the day when the city of God shall utterly vanquish whatever in him or in the universe despises its invitations, and dwells as an alien beside it. Thus, in the very midst of the description of the heavenly inheritance—of the highest blessings which it is possible for us to receive, or God to bestow—we are still reminded of that which is dark, and foul, and terrible. Were the highest state one of mere innocence, one in which there is no knowledge of good and evil, this could not be. But if the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, can find no more glorious object of contemplation than the Lamb which was slain; if the Cross is the true

tree of life; then the blessedness which the New Testament reveals is not a blessedness which can ever be separated from the recollection of a triumph won over selfishness, and from the desire and hope to take part in the battle with whatever remains of it in God's universe.

IX. *"I Jesus have sent my angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."*

In this complete unveiling, nothing is lost of all the previous revelation. Jesus the Saviour, born of the Virgin, the root and offspring of David, recalling all that belongs to Jewish life and the old dispensation—the bright and morning star, whom Magians sought in their faithful ignorance—the Light of the whole earth—all these names had need to be repeated, that the Churches of Asia might receive the testimony which was sent to them concerning their King, and Brother; that they might send that testimony forth into the world; that we might take it not as an heirloom from them, but fresh from the lips of Him who is with us, as He was with them. Only because they believed that He was indeed in the midst of them could they deliver His message to mankind; only while we believe that He is with us can we deliver it. It is a grand, all-comprehending message, meeting all the wants of men, social and individual, penetrating beneath all that is evil. *"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst say, Come. And whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."* If we could, in any little measure, believe these words—if we did, indeed, own that the Spirit of the Eternal God was Himself speaking them to the thirsty and



broken spirits of men in all regions of the earth—if we did hear them echoed by the Church of all ages—we might be permitted, each in his own little sphere each by the strength and encouragement which he is able to give his brothers in their spheres, to bear a part in the work of breaking the chains that bind our race. And we shall be taught, brethren, in wonderful ways, that this power is bestowed upon the weakest, if they will but ascribe it to the Spirit and the Bride, and not to their own might or wisdom. Very feeble words will enter into the hearts of human beings, and will seem to die, and when they have died will bear fruit. For the words are not ours but His in whom is life, and whose life is the light of men. And this makes the sentences that follow very awful indeed to those who have dared to open their lips in delivering and interpreting the lessons of the Apocalypse or of the Bible.

X. *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”*

That this message is addressed specially to us, the ministers of God's word and sacraments ; that it tells us that He will plague us if we add any fancies and theories of ours to that which He has revealed of Himself, and of His own character and purposes ; that He will hide from us His truth, which is our deliverance, if we rob those to whom we are sent of that which they need for their deliverance ; this I cannot doubt : I am sure that whatever is written here must mean far

more than I can see in it. But I am sure that it is unsafe to turn this language to the condemnation of any other man. I am sure it is needful for every man to ask that He who uttered it will use it for his own trial and purification. If we do ask that, I cannot doubt that the next words will be dearer and brighter to us than they have ever been.

XI. "*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly ; even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"

If I have in these sermons succeeded in showing you that the Lord Jesus Christ did, in very deed and truth, manifest Himself in the latter days of the old dispensation — that apostles and saints were not deceived in their expectation that the end of an age was at hand, and that a newer and more glorious age was to succeed it—I trust I shall have given you fresh strength and warrant for believing these warnings, and praying this prayer. Supposing the Apostle was disappointed—supposing what he looked for did not come to pass—the like calamity may be reserved for us. Admit the revelation of Jesus Christ the Son and Word of God to have been real for him, then it is real for us. We shall attribute the darkness which hides the Friend, the King, the Judge of the World from us to ourselves and not to Him. And then the clouds that gather about our own steps, or about the destinies of the earth, will be reasons for asking that He will come and scatter them. And every mist that has disappeared in past time will be a pledge for the future, because we shall own and accept it as a sign of the Son of Man,—a token that the daylight was breaking through our night.

XII. And the revelation to us will not be a revelation chiefly for us. It will be a revelation of the first

begotten of the dead, of the Prince of all the kings of the earth, of the Lamb that was slain, of the brightness and glory of the Father. That brightness and glory will at last fill all the earth. Even so every day, to him who is watching alone in his own sadness and despondency, to God's every Church, in the midst of the world's gloom; even so to all human beings; "*Come, Lord Jesus.*"

## LECTURE XXIII.

### PARTING WORDS.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.—  
REV. xxii., 21.

THIS is the last verse of the book upon which I have been speaking to you for some months; the last verse of the Bible. If we think of it, we may find that the very message of the Apocalypse, and of the Bible, is gathered up in it.

I. When you hear the word *Grace* pronounced in a pulpit, you conclude at once that it has a technical signification; you cast aside, or try to cast aside, the associations which you have with it at ordinary times. Do not make this effort, my friends; it is not a wise one; it defeats itself; it robs us of the deep and peculiar virtue which belongs to the expression in the Scriptural use of it. Allow yourselves to think freely of whatever has presented itself to you as most graceful in the intercourse of life, in the study of art. Do not exclude from your reflections that which was most exquisite in the outward form and its movements; do not forget what you have described as grace in the animals or in any inanimate object. You will feel—you cannot help feeling—that whatever you admired without is determined by something within. There may be grace in stone, but only because it testifies of life. You speak

of grace lingering on the countenance of a corpse ; you mean that it still bears the impress of the living being whom you knew and loved. You are therefore always recalled from looks and acts to something which they denote. You are sure that the grace which *appears* in them *is* in that which you cannot see ; in the person who looks and who acts.

Reflect on these simple observations, and they will help you, better than many accurate definitions, to apprehend how outward visible signs may betoken an inward spiritual grace. And will they not lead you a step further ? At first the grace which you delight in strikes you as something inherent in the person to whom you ascribe it. You observe on the contrast between the grace of one fellow-creature and the ungracefulness of another. You are inclined to call the latter common or vulgar, the former peculiar or exceptional. There is great excuse for that judgment ; to reverse it seems like the most flagrant paradox. And yet ask yourselves if you are not doing injustice to those persons whom you most commend when you seek to separate them from their kind. Is it not a *human* grace which you recognise in them ? If you could not give it that name, would it not lose half its charm and sweetness ? So far as it is a departure from a human standard—so far as it is merely individual—is it not imperfect ? is it not less gracious ? When you speak or think of grace as rare or uncommon, do you not intend to say that few are free from those little affectations and wilfulnesses which mar their human symmetry, which create a certain irregularity and disturbance ?

There is, indeed, a flat, dreary uniformity, an absence of all distinctive qualities, of everything

strong and marked, which most of us think more disagreeable than even excesses and distortions. But you do not call that uniformity *grace*; it is the opposite of grace, for it is an approach to death. You want the fulness of life; you would like to see every energy in its perfect play; you long for a harmony which results from the co-operation of all energies. Anything short of this you feel is so far a defect. Yet you do not expect it—you do not even wish for it—in any one of your fellow-men. You feel that each one has some qualities which another wants; some powers in predominance which in his neighbours are subordinate, and are meant to be subordinate. The best are not those who try to be everything, and to accomplish everything; there is an evident awkwardness, presumption, disappointment, in such experiments. Those commend themselves to you most who seem to understand most clearly what their work is; who devote themselves to that; who best appreciate other men's capacities and callings, and most gladly profit by their help and service.

We see, then, how inevitably the thought of grace in shape and movement associates itself with the thought of moral grace, grace of character. But there is another use of the word, at least as common and obvious. We speak of grace as bestowed by a superior on an inferior; we connect it with royal condescension. We are conscious that these two senses cannot really be separated. A favour, we say, is painful, not pleasant, if it is bestowed ungraciously; that is to say, if it is done from constraint; if it is not an expression of the mind and purpose of him from whom it proceeds. Suppose it to be merely a favour to some special person—to be given out of liking to one rather



than to another—we condemn it as immoral—we disconnect it with grace. An unrighteous king, we are sure, cannot be a gracious king. His pardons and his rewards are alike determined by accident, or by some external influence; both are equally mischievous to those who are the objects of them, and to society at large.

If you try to conceive of a perfectly gracious government, you would set before yourselves one which had the effect of producing the very quality in the subjects which existed first in the ruler. You would think he had not effected his ends if he scattered ever so many blessings abroad, unless those blessings somehow tended to elevate the minds and characters of those who received them. You seek a power which shall be always addressing itself to the man in you, and in every person who has the form and countenance of a man; you seek a power which shall keep down and overcome that which is contrary to this. Now see whether the Scriptural idea of a kingdom of grace does not reconcile and fulfil what you have been trying to express in different broken phrases and forms. See whether, instead of being hard and technical, it is not more comprehensive and more practical than our common speech. When we are told that we are brought under a reign or law of grace, what is meant? Are we not taught that an actual Ruler, in whom all grace dwells, has taken us under His dominion, that He may act upon us to make us gracious? Are we not taught that He has dominion, not only over the outside of our existence, but over our thoughts, desires, hopes; over the springs of our life? Are we not taught that He is seeking to mould these into conformity with His character and will? that our out-

ward acts, words, looks, may express what is gracious, and not what is uncomely and base? Are we not taught that His operations are upon our wills, to make them obedient, to make them free? When St. Paul says that we are translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, is it not an empire of this kind that he indicates? Does he not command us to believe that it is under *this* we are living?

But he speaks, you will say, also of a kingdom of darkness. Did he describe merely that kingdom in which heathens are dwelling? May *we* not be dwelling in it? My friends, do not we know that we may? Have we not dwelt in it continually? Are we not apt, at every moment, to fall into it? For what is this kingdom of darkness but the kingdom of our own selfish solitary natures? What is it but a world in which we see nothing but ourselves, and images of ourselves, in the heaven above and in the earth beneath? We call it sometimes the state of the natural man; that is to say, of the man wrapt in himself, apart from his fellows, apart from God. Scripture calls it oftener still the state of death, because all life consists in going out of ourselves, in receiving influences from earth and from heaven, in having fellowship with earth and heaven. That state of nature or of death is always about us. Each man ought to know that if he were left to himself for an instant, he should plunge into it and be lost. But each man ought also to know that he is *not* left to himself for an instant, that a gracious kingdom is compassing him round, that gracious powers are acting upon him from his birth onwards, that there is about him an unutterable Gentleness, Goodness, Forgiveness; that it is striving to make

him gentle, forgiving, good; that he may yield to it and be controlled and reconciled by it, just as he may revolt from it and live at a distance from it. Oh, never think, I conjure you, that what is called the regenerate or gracious state in Scripture is a strange, irregular state which is meant for a few, and from which mankind is excluded! The gracious state is the human state, the selfish deathly state is the inhuman state. It is the state which we choose for ourselves when we throw off the easy yoke, the light burden. It is the state into which we descend because we will not assert our human rights, because we prefer chains to liberty.

II. And so we come to the next words of the text, those which contain the necessary explanation of the first, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" We are very apt to resolve this name into some poor equivalent. We say that we live under a Christian dispensation, that we are brought within the range of Christian influences, and so forth. All which language is good if we render it back into the honest and simple language of Scripture, if we interpret it by that; very bad if we reduce the Scriptural language into it. The Christian dispensation is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, or it is nothing. Christian influences, or the means of grace, are the gracious powers which proceed from Him, or they are nothing. And as we are fond of reducing a person into an abstraction, so we are apt, even when we speak of Him as a person, to take only some portion of His name, not the whole of it; to divide or to confuse what the Scripture presents to us as distinct and as one.

First, the Bible bids us think of *Our Lord*. We are to remember that we are under One who has

manifested Himself as in the highest, fullest sense, the Lord of Man; the Lord not merely of the outward economy of our lives, but of our own selves, of our hearts and reins. We are to recollect that He knows us as we are, knows our individual characters, temperaments, constitutions; knows our outward circumstances; knows our relations to each other. We are to recollect that all these have been ordered and disposed by Him; that we and they have not been created once, and then turned adrift to work as well as might be without Him, but are under His eye and superintendence every hour and moment. We are to remember, that if each man has a right to say and ought to say, "He is *my* Lord," yet, that "*our* Lord" is the better, the inspired expression; that it contains the other in itself, that it reminds each man that he is not alone in the world, and that the care which is exercised over him does not interfere with the care over any one of his fellow-men. It would not be universal care if it were not individual, it would not be individual if it were not universal. Does that word *our* seem to imply a tenderness which is inconsistent with judgment and scrutiny? Brethren, no real tenderness can be apart from judgment and scrutiny. We need to have the precious and the vile separated in each of us. All society demands that same separation. He who is our Lord must be our Judge. But,

Secondly, He is our Lord *Jesus*. That name recalls His life and work upon earth. It brings before us the Child at Bethlehem, the Boy in the Temple, Him who went about doing good, the Deliverer of the bodies of men from their plagues. It reminds us of Him who spoke on the Mount, of Him who taught by parables, of Him who sat with the disciples at the

Paschal Feast, of the agony in the garden, of the death on the Cross. In all these acts, and words, and sufferings, Jesus, the Saviour, the Son of Man, was manifesting Himself. In all these He was showing forth that perfect grace which can only appear in humiliation and sacrifice. In all these He was giving up Himself, He was contesting with the Spirit of selfishness, He was redeeming our nature from its tyranny. Oftentimes, in the contemplation of His perfect human grace, men have been disposed to forget whence it came; to think of the Son as separate from the Father; to forget that the glory of His life and work was this, that He refused ever to separate Himself from the Father, that He did nothing without the Father.

Thirdly, the Apostles always speak of Him as the Lord Jesus *Christ*. They compel us to remember that he was anointed of the Father; that the voice from Heaven proclaimed Him the only-begotten Son; that the Spirit of the Father descended upon Him; that in the might of that Spirit He wrestled with the evil spirit; that in the might of that Spirit He preached the Gospel to the poor, and broke the bonds of those whom the evil spirit had bound, and delivered the victims of death, and gave up Himself to death, and rose from the dead, and ascended on high. They describe the Christ as coming into the world to baptize with the Holy Spirit. They connect the Christ in Heaven with the promise of the Father which was fulfilled to the children upon earth. They speak of His triumph as accomplished, when He could send forth His disciples to preach to all nations, that God in Christ had reconciled the world to Himself, that He had given His Spirit to dwell with men, to rule their

hearts and tongues, that they might be sealed with the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the one God blessed for ever.

“*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*” comprehends all that is contained in this Divine revelation. It supposes the discovery to men of a Father who has sent His own Son to adopt them into His family. It supposes a deliverance from the tyranny of evil gods and of visible things. It supposes a recognition of men as endowed with spiritual capacities, created to bear the image of Him who is above them, and to rule over that which is below them. It supposes the establishment of sacrifice as the bond between the Divine and human nature, between the Divine and human life. It supposes the union of men into a society of which Christ is the living head, and which derives all its life from Him. It supposes the gift of a Comforter to dwell with them, and raise them, and unite them to their Father in heaven and their brethren on earth. It supposes the need of a perpetual renewal of Divine forgiveness and Divine strength, that men may not sink back into a worse death than that out of which He has raised them, that they may be witnesses for God, and bring forth fruits to God. It supposes a grace which shall be adapted to all special circumstances, sorrows, temptations. It supposes distinct graces flowing from the one perfect fountain of grace, which shall enable each member to fulfil its place in the body, to do the work which is assigned it without intruding upon the work of any other, to help the rest, to suffer with the rest. It supposes a continual struggle between life and death, light and darkness, grace and rude will, the Spirit and the world, God and the devil.

III. That the Churches of Asia might engage



heartily in this struggle, that they might be victorious in it, St. John says to them, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*" He knew that in one sense this grace *was* with them all, and would be with them all. If it had not been compassing them about when they were heathens, there would have been no Gospel to preach to them. St. Paul could not then have told the savages of Lycaonia that God was sending the rains from Heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. He could not then have prayed for the Ephesians that they might not live as the other Gentiles, ignorant of the life of God that was in them, alienated from Him by wicked works. The grace was there; the whole Creation would have withered if it had not been there; men would have destroyed it. But when He desired that it might be with them, He desired that they might know the power of it; that they might live under the habitual control of it, in the daily blessing of it. For redeemed, regenerate men to live as if they had never been redeemed, as if they were only born of the flesh, was possible, was easy: every day's experience shewed *how* possible, *how* easy. To hold fast that which they had received, to believe that which was true, required a continual effort. What should brace them to the effort? What should quicken them so that they should not become benumbed with the world's frosts, and covet sleep as benumbed men covet it, and die in that sleep? "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*" was the awakening, renovating energy. It was assured to them in their Baptism. When they ate the bread and drank the wine, there was a witness of its perpetual, unchangeable vitality, of its power to keep them and strengthen each of them in his own

tasks and trials. They might receive it in their daily food. All nature bore witness of it. They might receive it through the ministries of father and mother, of wives and children, of friends and of enemies. Crosses would be the sure pledges of it, seeing that in the Cross it was concentrated, that from the Cross it flowed down upon men.

I said that the Apostle desired this blessing for the Churches of Asia, and for all the members of those Churches. It is better to speak so. It is better to connect, as the Apostles always do connect, their divinest words, their most amazing assurances, with societies by which they were surrounded; with men and women whom they could distinguish by names. So the Gospel becomes definite; so we are reminded that it is addressed to creatures of our flesh and blood. But because it is so definite—because it is meant for creatures of our flesh and blood—it cannot be contracted to any region or any time. If the Apostle had said, “*My grace, my love be with you,*” his converts and disciples would have had a right to claim the words as theirs especially. But he knew that no such expression could satisfy any of them. He was obliged to take a higher flight that he might meet their necessities. He could say nothing less than this, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*” And that is the grace of the Son of Man and of the Son of God, of Him who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

My friends, for the last fourteen years I have been ministering this grace to you. In looking back upon those years I see cause enough for shame and humiliation. But I wish to say it solemnly, and for the last time, that I feel no sorrow and repentance for any

words I have spoken to you, respecting the absolute and eternal love of God; respecting the full and perfect manifestation of that love in the only-begotten Son; respecting the redemption and reconciliation which His incarnation and death, His resurrection and ascension, have effected for the whole world; respecting His presence with men and government over them; respecting the Eternal Spirit, who is One with the Father and the Son, and who is working in us, to guide us into all truth, to make us willing subjects of that love which has proved itself to be mightier than death and hell. I am deeply convinced that whatever I have said on these subjects has been too narrow, not too comprehensive; that any words which I have added to the words of the Scripture have contracted their freedom and the largeness of their application; that the Creeds and the Sacraments exhibit the eternal goodness of God, in its triumph over all that opposes it in every part of the universe, with a fulness which passes all that I have ever been able to think of or imagine. I mourn and repent because I have reduced these testimonies by my poor conception of them. I mourn over the coldness and hardness which must often have made them seem unreal to you. I mourn that I have not shown more confidence in the purposes of God towards you and towards all, more confidence that there is in each one of you that which craves for all good, and protests against all evil. For the insincerity and heartlessness which have kept me often at a distance from those whom I might have helped, I ask your forgiveness, and the forgiveness of Him whose message I have marred. And, therefore, it is an infinite comfort that I may part with you not with

words of mine, not with wishes of mine, but with the assurance that there is a grace which penetrates beneath all words and all wishes, which can make its presence felt, which can make us gracious. I may say to you: "Friends and brothers, in the midst of your work, when you are trying to be honest and faithful, and finding how hard it is to be honest and faithful; in your family circles; as English citizens; in lonely hours; when you are struggling with temptations which only the Searcher of hearts knows; when you are trying to pray and cannot pray; when all things in heaven and earth seem unstable; when you are crushed with the remembrances of failure; when you are looking in vain for faces that once comforted you; in your tribulation as in your wealth; in the hour of death; in that day of Judgment, which shall shew us how closely we have been related to each other, and what a Divine Power has been using even the feeblest instrument, to draw us to itself: may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

THE END.



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